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Understanding Youth Mentors' Experiences Mentoring their Younger Peers

Melissa Coyne-Foresi, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Nowicki, Elizabeth A., *The University of Western Ontario*

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Abstract

This dissertation comprises three investigations: (a) the relationships and connections former youth mentors experienced from mentoring their younger peers, (b) educators' interpretations of youth's thoughts on relational outcomes of mentoring, and (c) the skills and lessons former youth mentors took into their futures from their mentoring experiences. Former youth mentors engaged in group concept mapping activities that explored their relational and skill-building experiences two to four years after participation in the Wiz Kidz elementary school peer mentoring program. The first study focussed on former youth mentors' reflections on the relationships made during their experience in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program. The study utilized an attachment theory lens that paralleled the mentoring program goals to foster student connections to their schools and to the supportive people within them. Responding to an open-ended focus question that asked of the relationships and connections made in the program, 11 former youth mentors generated 77 statements. Former youth mentors were asked to sort the collective statements into themes and rated the importance of each. Statement ratings averaged moderate importance, with individual statement importance ratings ranging between not important and very important. We analyzed the sorted data using multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis to reveal key conceptual themes. Results produced a three-cluster concept model: (a) Communication Skills, (b) Relationships with Mentees, and (c) Connections with School and Staff.

The second study investigated educators' interpretations of the former youths' mentoring data from Study 1 also using an attachment theory framework. Fifteen educators were asked to sort and rate the 77 statements from Study 1. Through multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis, educators identified four key concepts: (a) Skills Mentors Learned in the Peer

Mentoring Program, (b) Mentors' Relationships with School and Staff, (c) Mentors' Experiences in the Peer Mentoring Program, and (d) Mentors' Relationships with Mentees. Results revealed considerable conceptual overlap with Study 1. However, educators rated the statements with higher importance compared to ratings in Study 1.

The third study investigated former youth mentors' reflections on the interpersonal skills and lessons learned from mentoring their younger peers in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program. The study used a positive psychology theoretical orientation that paralleled the mentoring program goals of engaging students in empathic social skill-building and character strengths-identifying activities. The same 11 mentors from Study 1 responded to an open-ended focus question asking how their participation in the Wiz Kidz program contributed to their lives. Responses to this question generated 56 statements that were collectively sorted into themes and rated on importance. Overall ratings averaged moderate importance with individual statement importance ratings ranging from somewhat important to very important. Through use of multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis, results revealed four key concepts: (a) Improved Communication Skills, (b) Developed Interpersonal Skills, (c) Enhanced Trust-building Experience, and (d) Increased Interest in Volunteerism.

This program of research provides insights into former youth mentors' reflections on supporting others, and the development of their communication skills, perspective taking, future-oriented goals, and improved interpersonal skills with both peers and school staff. Evidence supports the value of providing older elementary school-aged students with opportunities to serve as role models to younger students. Mentors, too, appear to benefit from learning from their mentoring experiences as their younger mentees do. Gathering all stakeholders' perspectives is imperative to understanding how the peer mentoring program experience is

received by its participants. Results inform program delivery in how youth conceptualize program objectives and identify practice implications associated with how both youth and educators interpret the youth mentoring experience.

Summary for Lay Audience

This research investigated the relationships and skills learned by former elementary school-aged youth mentors, two to four years after participation, in the Wiz Kidz in-school elementary peer mentoring program. The Wiz Kidz program meets weekly under the supervision of an educator to provide structured and supportive leadership experiences for youth mentors, and companionship and social support for younger mentees. Data collection and analysis utilized group concept mapping to address the research questions. Former youth mentors responded to two open-ended focus questions stemming from attachment and positive psychology theoretical lens and asked about relationships made through the program and how the mentoring experience contributed to their lives. Each unique statement was extracted from the interviews and returned to the participants to be independently sorted and rated by their perceived importance. Elementary school educators sorted and rated the youth data set pertaining to the relational outcomes of program participation. The youth- and educator-sorted and rated statements were processed using a tool for concept mapping analysis that was used to locate each statement on a separate point on a map and group the statements on the map into conceptual clusters. Average importance ratings were calculated for each statement and cluster. Results from the study of former youth mentors' reflections on the connections and relationships made through mentoring their younger peers produced a three-cluster concept model that discussed mentors' perceived improvements in communicating with younger students and awareness of their influential role model statuses. The results of the educator study revealed considerable conceptual overlap with

the youth study and produced four key concepts. Educators assigned higher importance ratings of the youth-provided statements than the youth study. Results from the youth study investigating the skills and lessons learned from mentoring their younger peers revealed four key concepts including mentors' improved communication and interpersonal skill development. This study emphasized mentors' perceptions of their self-reliance and responsibilities in their leadership roles. This study provided insights into the similarities and differences in how educators and former youth mentors interpreted the mentoring experience.

Keywords: mentoring in education, peer mentoring, student engagement, school connectedness, positive psychology, educators, program evaluation

Co-Authorship Statement

I, Melissa Coyne-Foresi, acknowledge that the three integrated manuscripts included within this thesis all resulted from collaboration with coauthors. In all three manuscripts, the primary intellectual contributions were made by the first author, who researched and designed the methodologies and methods, conducted literature reviews, sought appropriate ethical approvals, recruited all participants, collected and transcribed all data, led the analysis of all data, and led in the construction and writing of all manuscripts. The primary author was also the primary contact for the publication process.

The contribution of coauthor Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki (Chapters 2, 3, and 4) was primarily through her research supervision of the primary author, theoretical guidance, and support in the intellectual and editorial process of creating the work and preparing it for publication.

The contribution of coauthor Dr. Lynn Dare (Chapter 4) was primarily her support in the intellectual and editorial process of preparing the manuscript for publication.

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Research participation. Thank you to the former youth mentors and educators who participated in my doctoral research. Thanks goes out as well to the parents who consented to their children's participation in the studies. The valuable information provided by the former Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program youth mentors was the foundation to these projects. Thank you.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

In my work as a school counsellor, I provide support to students and their families to alleviate students' social, emotional, and behavioural barriers to learning. It is meaningful work, and some of the students I work with stay in my thoughts long after my work with them is done. I'd like to share a story about one such student. The student was in grade seven and was referred to me because of school attendance concerns. I discovered the student was frequently home alone while the family caregiver coped with a substance issue. When at home, the student regularly warded off physical attacks from an older sibling that sometimes ended in police intervention. At 12 years of age, the student was often on their own to get to bed at night and get up on time for school in the morning. The school staff were concerned by the student's escalating conflict with peers and teachers; the student made threats to younger children, often resulting in suspension from school and more time unsupervised at home. The student's teacher and I worked to support the student's social and safety needs.

Suddenly, it was the end of the school year and I would not see the student again until September. That summer, I often wondered if the student was okay. Was the student being hurt? Was the caregiver home? Did the student have safe place to go if needed? Summer vacation is not a restful time for students who experience an unpredictable and unstable home life. Over the ten weeks of summer, I spent my time planning an intervention to address that student's needs: how could I build the student's sense of school belonging and connectedness to be relied on as a protective factor while also fostering the student's social strengths for future prosocial use? These thoughts led to the beginnings of the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program intervention.

1.1 Youth as Mentors

Engaging students in bonding opportunities within the school encourages both prosocial behaviours and a connection to school (Karcher, 2005). Peer mentoring programs are an example of school-based initiatives that bring older and younger peers together to foster social skills and leadership development outside of the classroom. This program of research investigated the relationships made and skills learned by former elementary school-aged youth mentors who participated in the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) school-based elementary peer mentoring program. Participants were in grades seven and eight, and between 12 and 14 years of age, at the time of mentorship, and between 15 and 17 years of age at the time of study for this dissertation. While most peer mentoring literature focuses on the outcomes for mentees (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014), one study (Karcher, 2009) showed that youth mentors reported larger gains in school-related connectedness and self-esteem compared to their peers who did not participate in mentoring, suggesting beneficial outcomes for both mentees *and* mentors. Studies on youth mentoring, although limited in availability, generally focus on the immediate outcomes of program participation whereas this dissertation investigated former youth mentors' experiences two to four years after participation in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program. Thus, the goals of this dissertation were to (a) understand mentors' reflections on the relationships made during their mentoring experience, (b) investigate educators' interpretations of youths' thoughts on relational outcomes of mentoring, and (c) explore mentors' reflections on the interpersonal skills and lessons learned from mentoring their younger peers.

This introductory chapter discusses school-based peer mentoring programs and benefits of utilizing youths as mentors to their younger peers. We chose to investigate the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program because of its equal focus on the intra- and interpersonal experiences and benefits for mentors and mentees; however, due to the lack of studies in this topic, we chose to investigate mentors' experiences in their roles rather than the experiences of mentees. This program of research explored youths' mentoring experiences through two theoretical lenses that each align with Wiz Kidz program goals: student-school staff attachment relationships (Pianta, 1992) and positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). This chapter provides (a) context to the exploration of former youth mentors' reflections on the connections with others and lessons learned through mentoring their younger peers, (b) the theoretical foundations of this dissertation, (c) a description of the Wiz Kids peer mentoring program, and (d) the research questions that drive each of the three studies.

1.2 Peer Mentoring

School-based peer mentoring is an intervention strategy that can provide social benefits for both older and younger students. Research suggests that participation in school-based mentoring programs can serve as a protective factor in students' social development (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Karcher, 2009) by enhancing their connectedness to school (Karcher, 2005; Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002; King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002; Portwood & Ayers, 2005; Portwood, Ayers, Kinnison, Waris, & Wise, 2005), the family (Karcher, 2005; King et al., 2002), and the community (Portwood et al., 2005). For example, DuBois and colleagues' (2011) meta-analysis on effective youth mentoring programs found a common pattern in benefits for mentees on outcome measures, such as improved interpersonal and development processes, compared to declines in non-mentored youth. This pattern was

confirmed in other peer mentoring research that found program participation helped prevent the expected declines in connectedness that commonly occurs for all students over a school year (Karcher, 2011). However, the focus of these studies has been on outcomes for mentees whereas outcomes for youth mentors have not been studied to the same extent (DuBois et al., 2011; Tolan et al., 2014).

Utilizing a strengths-based approach, mentors and mentees may become more aware of their talents and interests through future-oriented activities that support their identity development and explore their leadership potential (Karcher, 2008). Youth mentors may experience change in how they see themselves and internalize their social roles (Rhodes, 2002). Further, students may benefit from relating to and learning from educators who serve as facilitators of social programming outside of the classroom.

1.2.1 Educators' understanding of the youth experience. While educators utilize classroom-based strategies to improve students' positive learning environments (Hughes, 2012), such as supportive teachers, less is known about intervention strategies to support building student/educator relationships (Murray, Kosty, & Hauser-McLean, 2016). Educators who serve as facilitators of peer mentoring programs can support students' relationships with school peers and staff (Hallinan, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Murray et al., 2016) by modelling social competencies, including initiative and creative thinking, that can lend to students' interpersonal and social skill development (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016).

When examining interventions to support student/educator relationships, it is necessary to gather all participants' perspectives (Hughes, 2012; Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010; Poulou, 2015). Although in many cases children and youth are intended to benefit from the results of research findings, their inclusion as research participants is scarce (Vaughn, Wagner, & Jacquez,

2013). Interestingly, while educators may believe they accurately understand the student experience, Nowicki, Brown and Dare's (2017) investigation of children's beliefs about why classmates with learning difficulties are at risk of social exclusion showed that students may not conceptualize a given construct as adults think they do. In an investigation that compared how students and educators conceptualized how students perceive their classmates with intellectual or learning disabilities, it was revealed that students did not understand why social exclusion occurs as adults thought they did (Nowicki et al., 2017). Similarly, a study by Mitchell and colleagues (2010) found discrepancies in how students and school staff perceived school climate and its influence on academics. The authors emphasized the importance of utilizing the perspectives of all school member representatives, including staff *and* students, to inform future school initiatives (Mitchell et al., 2010). These findings confirmed the importance in gathering all stakeholder perspectives to ensure effective and relevant program implementation.

1.3 Theoretical Background

The two theoretical lenses used in this program of research, (a) student-school staff attachment relationships (Pianta, 1992), and (b) positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), align with the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) peer mentoring program goals to improve mentors' connections to their schools and relationships within the school (Pianta, 1992) and to identify and emphasize mentors' character strengths and skills (Seligman, 2011).

1.3.1 The foundation of connectedness: Attachment. Attachment theory (Bowlby 1969, 1988) is a psychological concept that supports the importance of "attachment" in child development and is marked by a deep, emotional bond among people spanning across time and space. As described by Ainsworth (1982, 1989), attachment, in its most ideal state, is an intimate bond where a parent or caregiver provides security and comfort to a child, allowing him or her

the ability to move from his or her secure base with confidence to engage elsewhere. However, in times of absence or unavailability of a parent or caregiver, children are likely to seek proximity to a person who can function as an alternative or secondary attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1989). Considering school as a place where children spend most of their day, teachers and other school staff can serve this role.

1.3.1.1 ***Connectedness to school staff.*** A relationship with at least one caring adult, not necessarily a parent, is one of the most important protective factors for youth (Bandura, 2008; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Although typically not as relationally exclusive and durable as with a principal caregiver (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012), other adults such as grandparents, teachers, and neighbours may satisfy as a "parent surrogate" (Ainsworth, 1989, p.711) and secondary attachment figure for children who have not found a secure base in their principal caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1988; Zajac & Kobak, 2006). Beyond family members, educators are most frequently identified as mentors by youth (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Fittingly, the school environment provides students a natural mentoring relationship with educators where their increased availability and supervision can serve as a secure base (Luthar, 2006; Portwood & Ayers, 2005) to support children's social needs and engagement in learning (Pianta, 1999). Robert Pianta's (1992) *Beyond the Parent: The Role of Other Adults in Children's Lives* is considered a seminal writing in the shift towards investigating other adults, including teachers, as influential supports for children's social development, especially for those with inadequate relationship histories. Thus, the current program of research aims to extend beyond that of student/teacher relationships and include other elementary school educators such as administrators and support staff.

1.3.1.2 ***Connectedness to peers***. Attachment and connection with peers lead to protective

factors (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth's (1989) work on attachment theory supports the need to belong as innate and responsible for shaping one's emotional and cognitive need for regular social contact to feel connected to others (Bandura, 1982). A meta-analytic review found that secure early attachments with peers fostered continued competencies in other peer relations and played a profound role in children's future peer competence (Groh et al., 2014). In terms of providing guidance, it is noted that peers often lack the judgment and maturity of adults (Kobak, Herres, & Laurenceau, 2012); however, the provision of these relationships within a supervised context, such as that of a structured peer mentoring program, can encourage prosocial development among peers. Furthermore, such positive relational affiliations can translate to improved social abilities among students engaging within the broader school environment.

1.3.1.3 ***Connectedness to school.*** When youth feel a sense of belongingness to school, they are more invested in their education, see themselves as part of the school's success, and value the relationships and institutions where they experience these connections (Karcher, Holcomb, & Zambrano, 2008). Research on bullying has shown how positive school climates, including supportive and protective teachers, have fostered students' attachment to their schools; in addition, these attached and supported students discourage bullying behaviour and are less likely to bully others (Smith, 2012). Mentoring can be used as a social intervention to enhance school connectedness. It can provide students with social bonding opportunities and a sense of belonging while developing stronger connectedness to self, others and society (Karcher, 2005).

1.3.2 Positive psychology: Building on student strengths. Like attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), positive psychology promotes the enhanced functioning, competence, and mental wellness in the developing child (Roberts, Brown, Johnson, & Reinke, 2002). In some

ways, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) can be conceptualized as the linkage of past and present through relationships with others, whereas positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) encourages a relationship with oneself moving into the future.

Positive psychology serves to examine optimal human functioning (Gilman, Huebner, & Furlong, 2014) and emphasize human strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Watkins, 2016). It challenges the traditional negative-oriented disease model (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) to instead focus on the enhanced functioning, competence, and mental wellness of children (Roberts et al., 2002), and promotes early intervention (Bandura, 2008; Roberts et al., 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Gilman and colleagues (2014) stated: "…the foremost goal of most parents is not to prevent psychopathology but to instill and promote skills and values that contribute to a productive life" (p.5). It is no surprise that well-being for children is a top priority for parents; however, schools have traditionally prepared students for success in the workplace with little focus on self-reflection and personal wellness (Seligman, 2011). Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) noted that improved well-being supports learning and argued that strategies to promote happiness should be demonstrated early and taught in school.

1.3.3 The intersection of attachment and positive psychology: Peer mentoring programs. There is agreement in both attachment (Bowlby, 1988) and positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) theories that nurturing environments can support children's developing strengths (Gillham et al., 2013). Educators serving as facilitators of social programming can serve as role models and a source of support to student participants (Hallinan, 2008; Hughes, 2012; Murray et al., 2016). Educators, and arguably the school as an institution, are part of a broader community of support for children that extends beyond the home and can alleviate

children's unmet needs. Social programming facilitated within the school can complement this care and maximize current student supports instead of seeking new ones (Luthar, 2006).

The Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) peer mentoring program attempts to provide these foundations in the character development of its youth mentors and younger mentees: students are encouraged to build relationships with the supportive people at school who can serve as a source of safety and belonging. In turn, students' perception of care can provide a platform on which this secure connection can be built to explore and further prosocial skills and aspirations for the future.

1.4 School-based Peer Mentoring: The Wiz Kidz Program

The Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) peer mentoring program meets once per week for 34 weeks under the supervision of a school counsellor. The Wiz Kidz program offers structured and supportive leadership experiences for grades seven and eight youth mentors, and companionship and social support for mentees in grades two and three. Through the provision of safe, supportive, and strengths-identifying activities and reflections, the Wiz Kidz program fosters students' sense of responsibility, as well as encourages a sense of belongingness to the group and extended school institution. Five sessions of Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) programs were facilitated between 2013 and 2017 with 95 student participants. Three cohorts (Wave 1, Wave 3, and Wave 4) completely adhered to program fidelity; any deviations from the program description below are noted in Appendix A.

1.4.1 Wiz Kidz program format. In the fall of the new school year, interested grades seven and eight youth mentor volunteers are provided with two hours training prior to being matched with a mentee. Training explores themes of mentee engagement and challenges in the mentoring relationship. It follows a school support counsellor-created mentor manual that

discusses foundational concepts in the mentoring process, including active listening, use of eye contact and communication through body language. The mentor training manual is also used as a workbook for mentors to explore short-answer and multiple choice-style exercises, case scenarios and opportunities for self-reflection. Working individually and in small groups, mentors discuss engagement strategies for their mentees and learn of sensitive issues that may arise in session, such as matters of confidentiality.

Grades two and three students are selected by the facilitator and staff as mentees who would benefit from one-on-one social support from an older peer within a supervised group setting. The youth mentors are matched with the mentees within the first few sessions based on the facilitator's observation of compatibility. Beyond the program's structured opportunities for discussion and play, the school support counsellor offers mentors and mentees direction in discussion, and addresses concerns in the relationships. The school counsellor also provides 15-minute weekly group supervision meetings with mentors to discuss concerns and offer solutions and support.

Each weekly session begins with the mentoring partners eating lunch together or in small groups, followed by a guided activity that focuses on relationship building and collaboration for the mentoring partners. The sessions end with a whole-group activity that requires group strategy and cooperation. The program features a mid-year bake sale for the school where matches work together to sell treats, with funds returned to the school. Program termination activities include a group photo, cards made by each student for their match, and a year-end party funded with a portion of the money raised through the bake sale.

1.4.2 Wiz Kids program goals. The Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program has two overarching goals. The first goal is rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) to foster

students' connections to their schools and to the supportive people within them (Pianta, 1992). The Wiz Kidz program facilitator provides youth mentors with guidance to broaden social skill development and build empathic relationships with each other, their mentees, and school staff. The second goal aligns with positive psychology theory (Seligman, 2011) to engage students in skill-building and strengths-identifying activities aimed to promote self-efficacy. The Wiz Kidz program helps shape participants' self-efficacy by focusing on success through mastery. For example, participants engage in whole-group games that encourage group collaboration, respect, and problem-solving. Through these activities, peer mentors demonstrate awareness of their behavioural modelling and recognize that mentees look to them for direction (Coyne-Foresi, 2015).

To maintain consistency with the Wiz Kidz program objectives to enhance participants' relationships with others and build intra- and interpersonal skills, this program of research investigated the reflections of former elementary school-aged youth mentors through two theoretical lenses: (a) student-school staff attachment relationships (Pianta, 1992), and (b) positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). In addition, this investigation sought to broaden the scope of peer mentoring program facilitation beyond school counsellors to include educators who have experience working with older elementary school students.

1.5 Research Questions

Though the experiences of child and youth mentees are well documented (DuBois et al., 2011; Tolan et al., 2014), the experiences of youth mentors have not been explored to the same extent. Facilitation of school-based programming outside of the classroom can foster students' social and relational development with peers as well as educators who run the program (Karcher, 2009; Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016). Understanding how educators conceptualize the youths'

experiences as mentors to younger peers is key to informing future peer mentoring program design and delivery.

The three studies presented in this dissertation utilize group concept mapping methodology (Kane & Trochim, 2007; see Chapters 2-4) to shed light on how both former youth mentors and educators conceptualize the peer mentoring experience. The first study explores former youth mentors' reflections on the connections and relationships made with others through participation in the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program and asked, "What associations or connections to school, teachers, and friends did former mentors experience during their participation in the Wiz Kidz program?" This question was examined through an attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) lens and emphasized former youth mentors' reflections on their connections to their schools and relationships within the school (Pianta, 1992). The second study features educators' interpretations of youths' thoughts on relational outcomes of mentoring in Study 1, and asked, "How do educators who work with and facilitate school programming for older elementary students interpret the youth mentoring experience?" The third study asked, "What skills or lessons did former youth mentors learn in the Wiz Kidz program and bring with them into their futures?" The third question stemmed from a positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) lens. It examined the influence of former youth mentors' participation in future-oriented, strengths-based, and skill-building programming. Overall, this dissertation highlights the intra- and interpersonal benefits of elementary school-aged youth mentors serving as role models to their younger peers.

The principal research question that guided this research inquired about the youth mentoring experience. The chapters that respond to this overarching question are written as independent manuscripts, formatted for publication, and presented in an integrated article format.

Chapter Two, *Building Connections and Relationships at School: Youth Reflect on their Roles Mentoring their Younger Peers*, investigates the relational outcomes of the former youth mentors' mentoring experience. Chapter Three, *Fostering Relationships at School: Educators' Evaluations of Former Youth Mentor Program Experiences*, explores the educators' interpretations of the data provided by youth in Study 1. As additional stakeholders in school-based social programming, educators interpreted the data provided by youth on their reflections of the connections and relationships made within the peer mentoring program. Chapter Four, *Youth Mentorship: Exploring Long-Term Benefits for Mentors Through Group Concept Mapping*, takes a future-oriented perceptive and explores the application of skills and lessons former youth mentors learned through program participation towards their future endeavors.

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2. Chapter Two: Building Connections and Relationships at School: Youth Reflect on their Roles Mentoring Younger Peers[1]

Participation in school-based mentoring relationships can enhance students' affiliation to social spaces, including both school and home, as well as to individual sources of support, such as teachers and caregivers (Karcher, 2005, 2014). By bringing older and younger students together, peer mentoring programs and can enhance both students' prosocial development and social support within a supervised context (Karcher, 2005). The Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program is a weekly structured and strengths-based elementary school peer mentoring program that supports leadership development for seventh- and eighth-grade youth mentors (12-14 years of age) and companionship for younger mentees. The current study investigated former youth mentors' reflections of the relationships and connections made with school staff, peers, and the school itself as a result of mentoring their younger peers through the program; data were collected from youth mentors two to four years after participation in the program. The Wiz Kidz program encourages student connection and belonging to school, and to perceive school as a place of safety; this investigation was examined through a students' relationship to school and school staff lens (Pianta 1992). Group concept mapping (GCM) was used as methodology that honours the youth mentor participants as stakeholders in the program and of whom provide crucial perspectives on the experience of mentoring their younger peers.

Most school mentoring research examines adult mentors matched with youth mentees or high school-aged youth mentors matched with child mentees (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). Adults who served as mentors to youth mentees reported improved beliefs and attitudes towards youth (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Zeldin, 2002) as well as improved

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relationships with youth (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013). Little data is available regarding youth mentors matched with child mentees from within the same school setting (Karcher, 2014; Portwood & Ayers, 2005). Thus, this study examined the experiences of former elementary school-aged youth mentors. Although not equipped with the same breadth of life experience and maturity as older mentors, elementary school-aged youth mentors are more accessible to their younger peers and can serve as natural role models who can positively influence mentee academic attitudes (Chan et al., 2013), self-esteem, prosocial behaviors (Chan, et al., 2013; Coyne-Foresi, 2015) and school attendance (Coyne-Foresi, 2015; Grossman et al., 2012). In addition, most peer mentoring literature focuses solely on the outcomes for mentees (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014). For example, Curran and Wexler's (2017) systematic review of school-based programming found only two peer-reviewed articles assessing the positive outcomes for youth in a mentoring role to their younger peers. However, youth serving as mentors also reported larger gains in school-related connectedness and self-esteem compared to their peers, suggesting that peer mentoring programs can promote positive development in both mentees *and* mentors (Karcher, 2008).

Using an attachment focus (Bowlby, 1988), with attention to the relationships and connections made within the school (Pianta, 1992), this study investigated the experiences of former youth mentors who participated in an elementary school-level peer mentoring program. Eleven youth between 15 and 17 years of age were asked to reflect on their past mentoring experiences in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program when they served as peer mentors when between 12 and 14 years of age. Group concept mapping is described as a youth-friendly

methodology (Dare & Nowicki, 2019) and was utilized to illustrate specific relationships and connections former youth mentors made through mentoring their younger peers.

2.1 Fostering Connectedness to School

As children and youth navigate pathways to their futures through the choices and decisions they make, it is imperative they receive the support and guidance from the caring adults who contribute to their upbringing (Noam, Malti, & Karcher, 2013). Luthar's (2006) review of the last 50 years of resilience research found that resilience grows from relationships, specifically through meeting basic needs and developing positive connections with others. Connectedness promotes a sense of comfort, ease, and belongingness that is experienced through active involvement with individuals, groups, or institutions, such as that of school (Hagerty, Lynch Sauer, Patusky, & Bouwsema, 1993). Research on student connection to school and staff (Karcher, 2005; Pianta, 1992) is considered an extension of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988).

2.1.1 Fostering connectedness to peers. In the broadest sense, attachment and connection with peers lends to protective factors for humans as a social species (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth's (1989) work on attachment theory supports the need to belong as innate and responsible for shaping one's emotional and cognitive need for regular social contact to feel connected to others (Bandura, 1982). A meta-analytic review on peer relations found that secure early attachments with peers fostered continued skills in other peer friendships and played a profound role in children's future peer competence (Groh et al., 2014). In terms of providing guidance, peers often lack the judgment and maturity of adults (Kobak, Herres, & Laurenceau, 2012); however, the provision of these relationships within a supervised context, such as that of a structured peer mentoring program, can encourage prosocial development among peers. Furthermore, such positive relational affiliations can translate to improved social

abilities among the broader school environment (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Mentoring can be used as a vehicle to school connectedness by providing students with social bonding opportunities and a sense of belonging, while developing connectedness to self and others (Karcher, 2005).

2.1.2 Fostering connectedness to school staff. Beyond family members, teachers and school staff are most frequently identified as mentors by youth (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005) and identified as contributors to their school engagement (Garcia-Reid, 2007). Fittingly, the school environment provides students a natural mentoring relationship with teachers and staff whose increased availability and supervision can serve as a secure base (Luthar, 2006; Portwood & Ayers, 2005) to support children's social needs and engagement in learning (Pianta, 1999). For example, a longitudinal study found that having a non-parental mentor was positively associated with later psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, educational attainment, and job satisfaction in adulthood (Miranda-Chan, Fruiht, Dubon, & Wray-Lake, 2016). Pianta (1992, 1999) shifted the scope of children's attachment relationships to include other adults, such as teachers, as influential supports for children's social development, especially for those with inadequate relationship histories. For example, students' perceptions of their teachers' leadership, friendliness, and understanding was correlated with students' perceptions of their own behavioural and emotional wellness (Poulou, 2015). Similarly, students' perceived social and emotional support from educators as well as provision of autonomy within the classroom contributed to students' feelings of competence to engage elsewhere within the school (Guthrie, Wigfield & VonSecker, 2000; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Conversely, students' perceptions of their teachers' behaviours of uncertainty, dissatisfaction, reprimanding and strict behaviours were associated with students' emotional and behavioural difficulties (Poulou, 2015). Students who do

not experience feelings of belonging within their school environments were more likely to develop poorer attitudes towards school and demonstrate adjustment problems compared to other students (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Poulou, 2015). It is apparent that students' perceptions of educators' support can contribute to varying developmental trajectories, ranging from associations with prosocial youth who demonstrate positive connections with their schools to that of a more isolated path where messages from adults are rejected (Smith, 2012).

For children and youth who do not have such a supportive figure, engagement strategies that support access to resources to foster their development of competence and improved attachment relationships can be useful. Such school-based strategies that provides leadership opportunities for youth, including the implementation of peer mentoring programs, can foster youths' adaptational systems of success and mastery that can translate to improved self-confidence and self-efficacy (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Masten & Reed, 2002).

2.2 School-based Peer Mentoring

With limited research on youth/child mentoring matches, there are special programming considerations for younger populations. For example, DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper's (2002) meta-analysis on the effectiveness of 55 youth mentoring programs found that participation yielded smaller effects compared to programs with adult mentors, but the outcomes were enhanced when best practices (i.e. length of involvement, contact frequency, mentor screening, mentor training, structured activities, supervision) were utilized and strong match relationships were formed (DuBois et al., 2002). Other peer mentoring research that showed program participation helped prevent the expected declines in connectedness that commonly occurs over a school year in both mentees and mentors (Coyne-Foresi, 2015; Karcher, 2011). To illustrate, Karcher (2011) explained that students' level of connectedness to school generally

declines as the school year progresses, with the highest levels of perceived connectedness experienced at the beginning of the school year. More broadly, with as many as half of students having reported feeling disconnected from their teachers at the high school level (Klem & Connell, 2004), early implementation of positive school programming interventions may be useful in buffering this normative decline in youths' connectedness to school observed over time (Karcher, 2008).

Below is a description of the Wiz Kidz in-school elementary peer mentoring program which was of this study's focus. The program was chosen for its emphasis of support and learning for both mentors and mentees.

2.2.1 The Wiz Kidz program. The Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) in-school elementary peer mentoring program fosters students' sense of responsibility and encourages their sense of belongingness to the mentoring group and extended school institution. The program meets weekly for 34 weeks under the supervision of a school counsellor who provides supportive and strengths-identifying activities and reflections. School counsellors are frequently responsible for facilitating student social-emotional and leadership programming within schools along with their additional roles addressing school mental health issues, crisis situations, parenting and family issues, and conflict resolution through advocacy and individual, family and group counselling. Further, the school counsellor serves as a caring adult role model during the provision of structured leadership experiences for youth mentors, and engagement and social support for younger mentees.

In the fall of the new school year, interested seventh- and eighth-grade youth mentor-volunteers are provided with two hours training prior to being matched with a mentee. Training explores themes of mentee engagement and challenges in the mentoring relationship. Mentors

follow a manual that features case scenarios and exercises on communication skills, engagement strategies, and confidentiality. Second- and third-grade student mentees are selected by the school counsellor program facilitator in collaboration with school staff as those who would benefit from one-on-one attention in a supportive group setting. The youth mentors are matched with the younger mentees within the first few sessions based on facilitator's observation of compatibility. Wiz Kidz sessions begin with the mentoring partners eating lunch together or in small groups, followed by a guided activity that focuses on relationship-building and collaboration for the mentoring partners selected from team-building literature for children (e.g., Badegruber, 2005). The sessions end with a whole-group activity that requires strategy and cooperation, such as an obstacle course or a relay race. Beyond the program's structured opportunities for discussion and play, the school counsellor offers mentors and mentees direction regarding concerns in the match relationships. The school counsellor also provides 15-minute weekly group supervision meetings with mentors to discuss concerns and to offer solutions and support.

The Wiz Kidz program is facilitated in schools with students from middle-income to government-supported housing and included students who have experienced child apprehension, parental substance use, and family or community violence. The goals of the Wiz Kidz program are to foster student engagement and connectedness to school for both the mentors and mentees, as well as to broaden social skill development, teach problem solving skills, and build empathic relationships. The program fosters students' connection to their schools and to the supportive staff within them and encourages students to participate as active members of their schools and to view the school as a place of safety in times of need.

2.3 Group Concept Mapping

This study utilized group concept mapping (GCM) as its methodology and provided former mentors a role in generating and interpreting the data. Group concept mapping (GCM) uses "…the open contribution of participant stakeholders' ideas on a specific issue, organizes the ideas, and portrays them in pictures or maps that are readily understood" (Kane & Trochim, 2007, p. 2). The goal of GCM is to gather a sampling of ideas rather than a representative sampling of persons (Kane & Trochim, 2007, p.36). This mixed methods design captures the complexities of lived experience and intersects the strengths of both the exploratory nature of qualitative investigation with generalizable quantitative methods (Andrew & Halcomb, 2006). Further, GCM's visual display of the quantitative analysis of qualitative data shows the group's thoughts and how the ideas are related to each other (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

The six-step GCM model includes: (a) preparing for concept mapping, (b) generating the ideas, (c) structuring the statements, (d) concept mapping analysis, (e) interpreting the maps, and, (f) utilization (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Preparing for GCM requires establishing a focus for the study and identifying and planning for stakeholder participation. Stakeholders' thoughts and ideas are generated through individual interviews or group brainstorming sessions. Next, the unique statements are extracted from the interviews or group sessions and returned to the stakeholders to be sorted, categorized and rated by importance. Concept mapping analysis involves the input of data to the Concept System Global MAX (Concept Systems Incorporated, 2017) software for multidimensional scaling and subsequent cluster analysis processing. The researchers interpret the maps and consider the conceptual themes of the clusters and statistical fit. Finally, utilization signifies the use of data to inform future programming (Kane & Trochim, 2007, p. 9).

The presence of children and youth in participatory research approaches have traditionally been uncommon, although in many cases they were poised to benefit the most from the results and future planning (Vaughn, Wagner, & Jacquez, 2013); however, involving youth in research is now a growing trend (Langhout & Thomas, 2010; Ozer, 2017). Involving young people in research is beneficial for children and youth to communicate their social needs to adults (Ozer, 2017) who have been challenged to consider children's and youths' knowledge and expertise in new ways (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). Pivoting on the experiences of program stakeholders as valuable sources of information, group concept mapping involves children and youth in data analysis. Group concept mapping is a methodology used to preserve and highlight the youth voice in communicating their experiences (Dare & Nowicki, 2019). In addition, the GCM methodology recognizes the competence and insights of children and youth as stakeholders and respects their roles in the social programming of which they are involved. For example, Nowicki, Brown, and Stepien (2014) utilized GCM in their investigation of social exclusion among fifth- and sixth-grade students. Children participated in interviews regarding their views on why their peers with intellectual or learning disabilities experienced social exclusion at school. The unique statements extracted from the individual interviews were combined and returned to the students for their interpretation. Results identified perceptions of differences, such as negative perceptions of physical characteristics and behaviors, to explain the social exclusion of children with intellectual or learning disabilities. Students provided insightful and meaningful contributions to understanding their experiences. This study supported children's capacities to participate in the GCM process (Nowicki et al., 2014). Another study by Ewan, McLinden, Biro, DeJonckheere, and Vaughn (2016) utilized GCM in their investigation to identify and develop strategies around adolescent health concerns. Results identified a range of

health concerns provided by the adolescents and family stakeholders. Of most importance, the authors emphasized the facilitation of stakeholder-driven ideas on a given topic and the use of GCM to generate discussion regarding interventions surrounding the topic (Ewan et al., 2016). These studies supported research approaches that involve children and youth who will ultimately benefit from the findings (Vaughn et al., 2013).

Considered an extension of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), students' connections to their schools and educators (Pianta, 1992) serves as a protective factor in students' social development (Bowlby, 1988). School-based programming, such as peer mentoring programs, can provide students with social support and leadership experiences (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Masten & Reed, 2002) to further students' interpersonal skills and relationship development with others at school (Karcher, 2005; Smith 2012). As the extant research primarily focuses on positive outcomes for peer mentoring program mentees (DuBois et al., 2011; Tolan et al., 2014), this research redirects attention to the mentoring experiences of youth serving as mentors to their younger peers, two to four years after program participation. Former youth mentors were asked of the associations or connections to school, teachers, and friends experienced during participation in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program. The purpose of this study was to provide an investigation of former youth mentors' reflections of the connections and relationships made through the program and examined through an attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) framework. Group concept mapping (GCM) methodology was used to involve the youth as program stakeholders in generating and interpreting the collective data. Providing youth mentors a platform for their program reflections was essential to understanding their experience.

2.4 Current Study

Contributing to research investigating youth peer mentoring, this study provides a unique investigation of former youth mentors' reflections on the connections and relationships made from their participation in the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program. Examined through an attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) lens, with an emphasis on students' connections to the school and to relationships within the school (Pianta, 1992), the research question asks, what associations or connections to school, teachers, and friends did former youth mentors experience during their participation in the Wiz Kidz program? Group concept mapping's (GCM) mixed methods design was utilized as a tool to capture and highlight the youth mentors' individual ideas and subsequent interpretation of the group's collective thoughts. Group concept mapping (GCM) was favored over more traditional mixed methods designs as it returns the individual participants' interview data to the group for further interpretation. In other words, individual participants were provided the opportunity to consider and evaluate the ideas contributed by other group members who participated in the same program. The mentor participants were stakeholders in the Wiz Kidz program and were asked to share their experiences of relationships and connections made through mentoring their younger peers.

2.4.1 Method

2.4.1.1 Participants. Five Wiz Kidz programs involving 95 student mentors (n = 48) and mentees (n = 47) were facilitated at two urban elementary schools in Ontario, Canada between 2013 and 2017. The program was conducted in two schools with ethnically diverse populations and general socio-economic statuses ranging from government-supported to low/average. Three mentor cohorts (n = 28) that participated through the full 34-week program duration were invited to participate. Two cohorts were not included in this study; one cohort ended early due to low

participant attendance and another cohort started late following the death of a school staff member. Eleven former mentors agreed to participate in the current study. Participants were eight female and three male student mentors in the tenth- and eleventh-grades and attended one of eight high schools in Ontario. The average age of participants was 15.9 years (SD = 0.83), with ages ranging from 15 to 17 years. Three participants had been Wiz Kidz mentors over two consecutive school years. Participants provided data two to four years after their participation as Wiz Kidz program mentors during their seventh- and eighth-grade years.

***2.4.1.2 Materials*.** The former Wiz Kidz youth mentors participated in an interview about the connections and relationships made through the program. Interviews included responses to two focus questions, one of which centred on former mentors' connection to school and school staff (Pianta, 1992) and is the focus of this paper. The second question was not relevant to the current study and is discussed elsewhere (Coyne-Foresi, Nowicki, & Dare, 2018). Use of a focal question assists in providing direction for the concept mapping conceptualization and is often worded to give the specific instruction to the participants (Kane & Trochim, 2007 pp. 9-10). As GCM is based on one general and broad question to avoid leading participants in a particular direction (Kane & Trochim, 2007), the question was, "When you think about what happened for you in the Wiz Kidz program, how would you describe the relationships and connections you made at school, at home, or in the community, or elsewhere?" The focal question is often restated as a prompt to satisfy the requirements if the initiative (Kane & Trochim, 2007, p.10); the prompt used to elicit more information in the current study asked, "Can you tell me more about that?" The audio-recorded interviews were processed to text via Trint (Version 3.1.19, 2017), a cloud-based transcription program, and were reviewed for accuracy.

Participants were provided with an envelope containing a set of the 77 statements, printed on cardstock, that had been selected by the researchers and extracted from the interviews. Participants were instructed to sort the statements into piles in any way that made sense to them and provide a descriptive label for each pile's theme. Clarification was made that each statement could not be put into its own pile nor could all statements be put into one pile. Included in the contents of the envelope was a sheet of paper with a list of all of the extracted statements from the focal question where participants rated the perceived importance of each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where a value of 1 = "not important," 2 = "somewhat important," 3 = moderately important," 4 = very important," and 5 = "extremely important."

2.4.1.3 Procedure. Following approval by the university's institutional review board, the researcher applied to conduct research through the former youth mentors' school boards' research departments. Upon approval from the school boards' institutional review boards, the researcher, also the Wiz Kidz program facilitator, provided the research departments a list of the student names (n = 28) sought for study participation. The school boards' research departments determined which schools the students attended and forwarded the Recruitment Letter, Letter of Information and Parent Consent Form, and Assent Form to each school's principal for distribution to the former youth mentor participants. Youth were required to contact the research team by email or by texting if they were interested in participating. Twelve former youth mentors contacted the researcher via email or text and communicated their interest in participating in the study. One student who communicated interest in participating later declined to be in the study. Parental consent was obtained for all participants (n = 11), as all were under 18 years of age. Five parents provided their consent for their children to participate through direct email with the researcher, two parents provided through direct phone contact with the researcher, two parents

provided their consent via text message directly to the researcher, and two signed parental consent forms that had been scanned then emailed to the researcher by the participants' principals.

*2.4.1.3.1 The interview phase***.** The 11 participants each participated in an independent interview. Interviews averaged 7 minutes and 43 seconds (*SD* = 2 minutes and 56 seconds). Three interviews were conducted over the lunch hour at the students' school, with the remainder (*n* = 8) conducted over the phone during evening hours. The eight students cited busyness as their rationale for requesting their interviews over the phone. Each interview participant received a $10 gift certificate following their interview.

*2.4.1.3.2 Data preparation***.** Interview transcripts were entered into Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus, 2016) where each statement constituted an idea and was placed in its own cell. All of the statements that answered the focal question (*n* = 104) were arranged into a list. Two researchers independently reviewed the list for individual statement meaning and redundancy. Sixty-five statements were initially agreed upon. Of the 39 statements not agreed upon, discrepancies were resolved by reviewing the list again for redundancy. This process resulted in 77 unique interview statements (Table 2-1). The unique statements were extracted verbatim, or as close to verbatim as possible, from the interviews (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

*2.4.1.3.3 The sorting and rating phase***.** The researcher coordinated a date with principals to meet as many interview participants as possible for the sorting and rating activity, where students arranged the unique statements obtained through the interview process. All interviewees (*n* = 11) participated in the GCM sorting and rating activity. The participants worked independently with up to three people in a room at a time to complete the sorting and rating task

Table 2-1 Statements for Each Cluster, Importance Ratings, and Statement Bridging Indices

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
Cluster 1: Communication Skills		**3.60**	**0.18**
21	Being in the program helped me listen to people better, listen to their opinions, and understand what they're trying to say.	4.45	0.02
44	I can communicate with kids and adults better because it's given me background on how to talk to both age groups.	4.27	0.02
39	The program made me realize that I'm not the only person and that there are a lot of people that need help.	4.18	0.17
40	I try to help others and give them somebody to talk to if they need it.	4.18	0.27
48	I now take into consideration who I'm talking to and how they'll understand better what's going on.	3.91	0.02
77	The skills I learned from the program actually helped me get my job.	3.91	0.13
1	I made relationships in the group.	3.91	0.31
43	I learned a different mindset to understand how to connect with people.	3.82	0.04
69	I feel like I'm more open since the program, and now am more outgoing.	3.82	0.05
3	It was a new experience talking to people I normally wouldn't have talked to.	3.81	0.19
56	The program has helped me in high school in trying to befriend some of my teachers and being able to talk to them about things.	3.73	0.08
16	Being in the program has helped with my connections.	3.73	0.27
41	I grew closer to some of my friends.	3.64	0.33
35	I learned about age gaps and that sometimes it doesn't matter, you can still be friends with the mentees.	3.55	0.15
58	The program has helped me become aware that not everyone will have the same attitude towards things as I do.	3.45	0.02
46	The program has helped me in giving direction and giving clear instructions on how to do the activities we did together.	3.45	0.05
45	Kids are very enthusiastic about things, and that has helped me become enthusiastic about things too.	3.36	0.11
6	You could find similarities between you and other people.	3.36	0.31
47	I had to explain things in a different way so the mentees could understand.	3.36	0.48
75	I became more responsible with how I dealt with my situation at home with my parents and siblings especially because we fought a lot.	3.27	0.15

Table 2-1 (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
36	The program helped mentors bond together.	3.27	0.43
8	All your stress was let go and you could talk about anything.	3.18	0.16
51	The mentoring experience made it easier for me to work in a group.	3.18	0.25
65	Kids used to scare me but having a mentee was cool and opened my eyes to know they're not that bad.	3.09	0.20
53	I've learned how to take a step back to consider how my younger family member is feeling.	2.91	0.16
52	I've realized that my younger family members process information differently.	2.91	0.17
Cluster 2: Relationships with Mentees		**3.51**	**0.24**
2	I made friends with the mentees.	4.18	0.06
22	I had a strong relationship with my mentee.	4.09	0.04
38	We all worked together for a purpose, like the time the gym floor was lava and we had to figure out how to cross using only mats.	4.09	0.72
60	After I came back to my elementary school one day, it was really impactful when my mentee saw me, broke down crying, and hugged me saying that he/she never thought he/she'd see me again.	4.00	0.23
4	The program was welcoming.	4.00	0.35
31	My mentee was really excited to be in the program, and I was excited to be there with them.	3.82	0.03
73	It's nice being able to see the mentees years later, see how they how they've been doing, what they've been up to, how they've changed in their lives, and how they've overcome obstacles that they were facing.	3.82	0.16
13	My mentee and I would talk if he/she was having trouble with friends.	3.82	0.20
15	The former mentees are comfortable around me when I volunteer at the elementary school because we used to spend time together in the program.	3.82	0.45
42	The program was fun.	3.73	0.50
7	Everyone was genuinely kind to each other.	3.72	0.18
33	I felt like my mentee's parents weren't really there for him/her, he/she just wanted me to be there for him/her.	3.55	0.19
32	I feel like a good person and am happy to see my mentee when I return to my elementary school.	3.55	0.19
9	You could spend time with other people.	3.55	0.22

Table 2-1 (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
10	My mentee was shy at first, and near the end was open with me.	3.55	0.22
72	Some of the children that were in the program who live in my community constantly talk to me, asking me what to do or how to handle situations they're in.	3.45	0.26
23	My mentee would run from his/her class to give me a hug or wave to me.	3.36	0.09
61	Realizing I made an impact in my mentee was cool.	3.36	0.13
37	We knew we were role models to the mentees.	3.36	0.15
11	My mentee was comfortable with me, we would goof around and be silly.	3.34	0.03
66	Whenever I would see the other mentors at recess, we would always have that one connection through the program.	3.18	0.35
24	When I return to my elementary school, my mentee remembers me and is so excited to see me.	3.09	0.12
17	My mentee and I would talk about the games in the program.	2.82	0.06
59	Sometimes my mentee didn't want to come to the program and sometimes refused to talk to me which was difficult.	2.81	0.64
25	I would talk about the program with the other mentors.	2.45	0.63
12	My mentee and I made a handshake between the two of us.	2.36	0.00
Cluster 3: Connections with School and Staff		**3.12**	**0.40**
5	You could express yourself in your own way.	3.82	0.29
68	If you respect school staff, they will respect you back and it's cool seeing that side of them.	3.73	0.26
26	My role as a mentor made me look more mature and involved in the school to school staff.	3.73	0.26
74	The relationship between the facilitator and I changed a lot because after joining it opened the door to talk more about anything that I had going on in my life.	3.73	0.31
62	The staff thought of me still as a mentor and I thought that was kind of cool.	3.72	0.24
20	The vice principal thought the program was a good thing and was glad that there were people helping others in the building.	3.64	0.23
54	The program gave me more respect for the school staff that deals with younger children.	3.64	0.25
55	Because of the experience, I got to talk with the teachers and facilitator one-on-one and gain a better understanding for the professional relationships between teachers and students.	3.64	0.30

Table 2-1 (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
34	I connected with the facilitator and got to know him/her better, otherwise I wouldn't have talked to him/her in the first place.	3.55	0.33
76	The year after the program, I got a job in my community as a junior leader in an after-school program.	3.45	0.48
63	I came from a different school, so being in the program made me feel more welcome in the school environment and made me feel really at home.	3.45	0.50
28	I loved my elementary school and loved being involved with it.	3.45	0.58
70	All the teachers knew that I was responsible.	3.18	0.22
27	I like that school staff viewed me differently when I was a mentor.	3.18	0.22
71	If the school needed someone to help with the younger kids, they were always asking me.	3.18	0.26
19	School staff were interested in the program and want to hear more about it.	3.09	0.16
67	I was really scared of teachers, but after the program I saw that they are just there to help you.	3.00	0.50
64	Before the program, I was not a big fan of talking to other people.	2.90	0.42
14	I return to my elementary school to assist with the school show.	2.64	0.33
57	I remember being frustrated with my mentee's quirks and didn't know how to make a connection with her, and have learned that everyone learns differently.	2.63	0.75
30	My parents were really interested to know if the mentees were okay and if my friends were okay.	2.45	0.39
49	I looked to the other mentors for help because of my lack of experience with younger children.	2.36	1.00
29	My parents would ask me about the program and about my mentee.	2.09	0.44
50	Some mentors had more experience than I did.	2.00	0.92
18	School staff didn't expect me to be in the program.	1.64	0.24

Note. Bolded values indicate averages of the respective cluster's content.

for this paper's focal question as well as the second question; the participants could not see each other's work.

The sorting and rating task for this paper's focal question took between 25 to 40 minutes (*M* = 32.7 minutes, *SD* = 5.6 minutes). Seven mentors completed the sorting and rating activity during their lunch break; three mentors who lived in the same neighbourhood, but attended different schools, met a member of the research team at a local coffee shop to complete the sorting and rating procedures. Due to distance, one participant was mailed the sorting and rating package, and she sent her data to the researcher as a phone text image. Each sorting and rating activity participant received a $10 gift certificate as compensation.

2.5 Results

2.5.1 Multidimensional scaling. Following the sorting and rating activities, statements were entered into and analyzed with Concept Systems Incorporated (Version 233.21, 2017) software. A multidimensional scaling data point map showed the sorted statements along X-Y coordinates displaying each statement's location and spatial relationship with the others. A stress value was calculated to show how well the point map fit the data (Nowicki & Brown, 2015). This value ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents an excellent fit, and 1 represents a poor fit (A Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Nowicki & Brown, 2015). The stress value was 0.2948, which fell within the acceptable range of 0.205 and 0.365 indicative of sufficient goodness of fit (Kane & Trochim, 2007, pg. 98).

2.5.2 Hierarchical Cluster Analysis. To ensure the statements are clustered with conceptually related statements, a hierarchical cluster analysis is conducted where boundary lines around the clusters differ between iterations but the points on the map do not change (Nowicki & Brown, 2015). In GCM, a bridging value is calculated for each statement and cluster (Kane &

Trochim, 2007). Bridging indices range from 0 to 1, where values near 0 indicate that the statements have been sorted in piles with nearby statements on the map (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Conversely, statements with values near 1 indicate that the statements have been sorted with statements further apart on the map (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Nowicki & Brown, 2015) and represent statements that may have been difficult to sort (Kane & Trochim, 2007). These indices explain both the conceptual meaning and relation of each idea across areas of the map (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Further, the bridging indices are used to determine the best-fitting cluster model.

Selecting the number of clusters for the final map is a key decision in GCM (Kane & Trochim, 2007). While there is no rule to selecting the appropriate number of clusters, consideration is taken to achieve a balance between detail, reflected by many clusters, and the bigger picture, reflected by few clusters (Kane & Trochim, 2007). In some cases, it is useful to invite a focus group of participants to aid in the selection of clusters, however, the review and interpretation of cluster decision-making can be confusing and burdensome for younger participants (Kane & Trochim, 2007). It is more typical for the researcher to select the final cluster solution in consultation with others from the project planning group and based on the analysis output (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Three researchers independently reviewed a range of models between two and 10 clusters and determined that the three-cluster map resulted in the simplest model that retained distinct concepts with acceptable bridging values. The three-cluster model reflected a small number of categories representative of the study's purpose investigating the themes surrounding former mentors' connections and relationships made through mentoring their younger peers. Further, the three-cluster model's acceptable stress value indicate good statistical fit (see Figure 2-1). Cluster labels were determined by examining the statements in the

clusters and with consideration of labels produced by the participants as well as the researchers' independent interpretations of the map; labels suggested by participants may be retained or edited for clarity (Kane & Trochim, 2007). The three key concepts were (a) Communication Skills (*M* bridging index = 0.18; 26 statements), (b) Relationships with Mentees (*M* bridging index = 0.24; 26 statements), and (c) Connections with School and Staff (*M* bridging index = 0.40; 25 statements).

2.5.3 Concept mapping summaries. Average bridging values for individual statements ranged between 0 and 1.00. Table 2-1 shows the statements grouped by cluster and indices. A mean importance rating was calculated for each statement, and mean cluster ratings were created by averaging the statements contained in each cluster. Importance ratings for statements ranged from 1.64 to 4.45 (see Table 2-1). Notably, nine of the 77 (11%) statements were rated as highly important (≥4.00) by participants. The statements with the highest mean ratings (≥4.00) were found in two of the three clusters. The importance ratings for clusters ranged between 3.12 and 3.60, indicating that all clusters were rated by participants as important.

2.5.3.1 Cluster 1: Communication skills. This cluster contained 26 statements and was sorted with the highest degree of consistency (*M* bridging index = 0.18). Participants rated this cluster as most important overall (*M* = 3.60, *SD* = 0.42), with average statement importance ratings ranging from 2.91 to 4.45. This cluster contained the most statements (*n* = 7) with low bridging values (≤ 0.05) in the data set (Statements 21, 43, 44, 46, 48, 58, and 69), signifying the statements as the best indicators of the cluster's content. Statement 21 had the highest average importance rating in the data set (4.45) and focused on the importance of listening: "Being in the program helped me listen to people better, listen to their opinions, and understand what they're trying to say." The second-highest rated statement (4.27) in the data set was also found in this

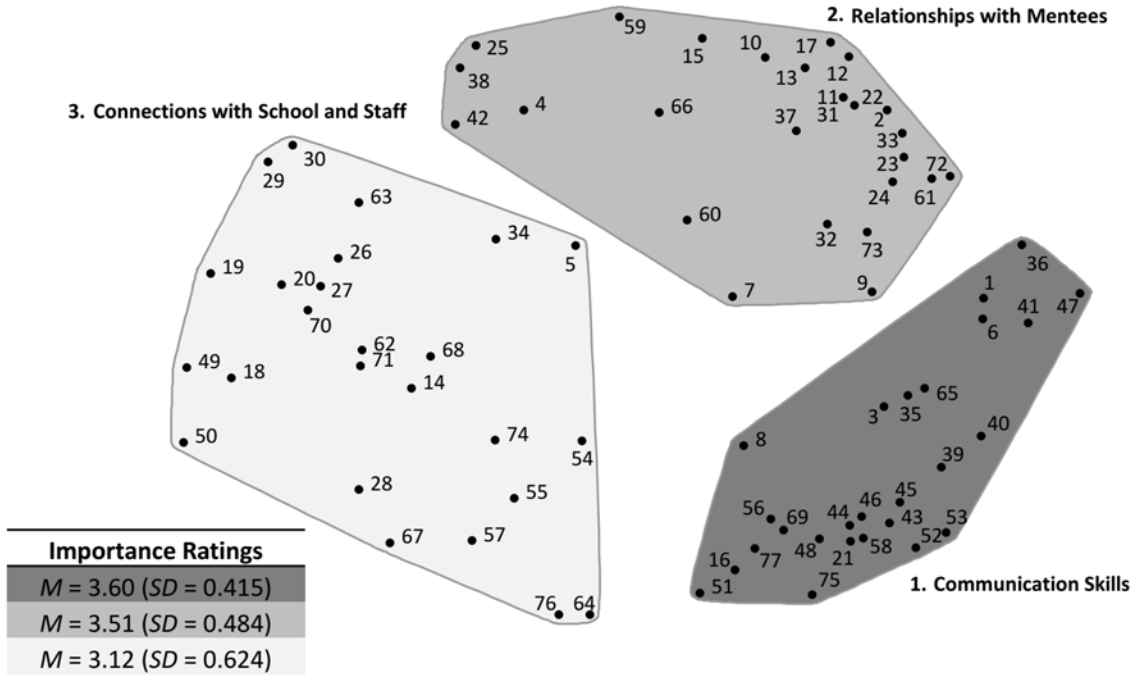

Figure 2-1: Concept map for the three-cluster solution showing spatial relationship between 77 generated statements.

Note. Statements are labeled by number (see Table 2-1 for a list of the statements and their reference numbers). Clusters are shaded dark to light per importance, where darker shading denotes higher mean importance rating.

cluster: Statement 44, "I can communicate with kids and adults better because it's given me background on how to talk to both age groups." These statements reflected former mentors' improved skills in communication with others in both expressive and receptive respects. An additional theme represented the cluster's content included talking to younger people and an awareness of mentees' level of understanding (Statement 46, "The program has helped me in giving direction and giving clear instructions on how to do the activities we did together," and Statement 48, "I now take into consideration who I'm talking to and how they'll understand better what's going on").

Statements reflected former mentors' perceptions of communicating and engaging with their mentees and others. Statements showed students' understanding of differing perspectives of others (Statements 39, 48, 53, and 58), specifically when conveying information to younger people and having to speak to their developmental level of understanding (Statements 46, 47, 48, and 52). For example, Statement 58 reported, "The program has helped me become aware that not everyone will have the same attitude towards things as I do" and Statement 47 noted, "I had to explain things in a different way so the mentees could understand."

Other statements reflected specifically on the relationships made with others in the group (Statements 1, 6, 16, 36, 41, and 43). For example, Statement 6, "You could find similarities between you and other people," and Statement 36, "The program helped mentors bond together." Some relationships were formed for mentors simply due to exposure to students they had not conversed with before (Statements 3, 35, and 45). For example, Statement 3, "It was a new experience talking to people I normally wouldn't have talked to," and Statement 35, "I learned about age gaps and that sometimes it doesn't matter, you can still be friends with the mentees." Two statements described relating to others at school and home: Statement 56 reported the

program's influence on students' improved relations with high school staff ("The program has helped me in high school in trying to befriend some of my teachers and being able to talk to them about things"), and Statement 75 reflected on students' role with family ("I became more responsible with how I dealt with my situation at home with my parents and siblings especially because we fought a lot.") Themes in this cluster reported improved communication skills and relationships made within the group, particularly with younger students.

2.5.3.2 Cluster 2: Relationships with mentees. This cluster contained 26 statements with average importance ratings ranging from 2.36 to 4.18 and contained a high cluster importance rating (M = 3.51, SD = 0.48). The participants sorted the statements in this cluster with a relatively high level of consistency (M bridging index = 0.24). This cluster had four statements with low bridging values of 0.05 or less (Statements 11, 12, 22, and 31). Statement 22 reflected a relational theme with mentees: "I had a strong relationship with my mentee." Statement 31 reflected the mentor/mentee match ("My mentee was really excited to be in the program, and I was excited to be there with them"), and Statements 11 and 12 reported mentor-perceived comfort within the match ("My mentee was comfortable with me, we would goof around and be silly" and "My mentee and I made a handshake between the two of us," respectively.)

This cluster noted former mentors' experiences working with and relating to their younger mentees. Participants reflected on the friendships (Statements 2, 11, 22, and 31) and connections (Statements 10, 12, and 23) developed with mentees; Statement 2 reported, "I made friends with the mentees," and Statement 23 added, "My mentee would run from her class to give me a hug or wave to me." Reflecting on their experiences, former mentors reported on their experiences encountering their mentees again months and years following their program involvement (Statements 15, 24, 32, 60, 72, and 73). For example, Statement 24 reported, "When

I return to my elementary school, my mentee remembers me and is so excited to see me," and Statement 73, "It's nice being able to see the mentees years later, see how they've been doing, what they've been up to, how they've changed in their lives, and how they've overcome obstacles that they were facing." In addition, former mentors noted their unique connection to each other through their affiliation with the program (Statements 25 and 66); Statement 66 reported, "Whenever I would see the other mentors at recess, we would always have that one connection through the program."

Reflective of their social responsibilities in the program, Statement 13 noted the mentors' role in providing guidance ("My mentee and I would talk if he/she was having trouble with friends"), Statement 33 referred to providing mentee support ("I felt like my mentee's parents weren't really there for him/her, he/she just wanted me to be there for him/her"), and Statement 38 reflected working together as a larger group ("We all worked together for a purpose, like the time the gym floor was lava and we had to figure out how to cross using only mats.") Participants also reported their awareness of the influence they had on their mentees: "We knew we were role models to the mentees," and "Realizing I made an impact in my mentee was cool," (Statements 37 and 61, respectively). Statement 59 highlighted a challenge experienced mentoring younger peers ("Sometimes my mentee didn't want to come to the program and sometimes refused to talk to me which was difficult.") This cluster reported on mentors' awareness of their role model-status and social responsibilities to the mentees.

2.5.3.3 Cluster 3: Connections with school and staff. This cluster contained 25 statements, ranging in importance from 1.64 to 3.82, and had a moderate importance rating (M = 3.12, SD = 0.62). Statement 18, "School staff didn't expect me to be in the program" received the lowest mean importance rating in the data set (1.64). The participants sorted the statements in

this cluster with a moderate degree of consistency (*M* bridging index = 0.40). This cluster contained the sole statement in the data set with a 1.00 bridging value (Statement 49, "I looked to the other mentors for help because of my lack of experience with younger children"), signifying that it was perhaps a difficult statement to sort (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Additionally, Statement 50 ("Some mentors had more experience than I did") and Statement 57 ("I remember being frustrated with my mentee's quirks and didn't know how to make a connection with her, and have learned that everyone learns differently") also had high bridging values (0.92 and 0.75, respectively) indicative of each's difficultly to sort.

This cluster's overall theme reflected former mentors' perceptions of school and school staff. Participants noted the relational connections they had with the school staff (Statements 55 and 67) and the program facilitator (Statements 34 and 74) as a result of participation. For example, Statement 55, "Because of the experience, I got to talk with the teachers and facilitator one-on-one and gain a better understanding for the professional relationships between teachers and students" and Statement 74, "The relationship between the facilitator and I changed a lot because after joining it opened the door to talk more about anything going on in my life." In addition, Statements 54 and 68 reflected former mentors' comments on their improved respect for school staff and their professional responsibilities in the school ("The program gave me more respect for the school staff that deals with younger children," and "If you respect school staff, they will respect you back and it's cool seeing that side of them," respectively).

Former mentors discussed how their participation in the program influenced how they believed they projected themselves to school staff (Statements 18, 26, 27, 62, 70, and 71). For example, Statement 26 reported, "My role as a mentor made me look more mature and involved in the school to school staff," and Statement 62 added, "The staff thought of me still as a mentor

and I thought that was kind of cool." Other themes reflected in this cluster included participants' involvement in school (Statements 14, 28, and 63), and community (Statement 76); Statement 14 reported, "I return to my elementary school to assist with the school show," and Statement 76 furthered, "The year after the program, I got a job in my community as a junior leader in an after-school program." Former mentors also recalled staff (Statements 19 and 20) and parent (Statements 29 and 30) interest in the program. For example, Statement 20 reported, "The vice principal thought the program was a good thing and was glad that there were people helping others in the building," and Statement 29 said, "My parents would ask me about the program and about my mentee." This cluster reported mentors' relationships with school staff and mentors' appreciation of the responsibilities staff have within the school. In addition, mentors described their experiences when they returned to their elementary school months and years following program participation.

2.5.3.4 Cluster map summary. Responses to the GCM focus question produced 77 unique statements with results best displayed in a three-cluster map with clusters labelled, (a) Communication Skills, (b) Relationships with Mentees, and (c) Connections with School and Staff. The low stress value provides evidence that the former youth mentors perceived the connections they made through the Wiz Kidz program in a relatively consistent way.

2.6 Discussion

This investigation contributed to research on the outcomes of youth serving as mentors to their younger peers (Grossman et al., 2012; Karcher, 2014; Portwood & Ayers, 2005). The purpose of this study was to investigate the reflections of former elementary school youth who served as Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program peer mentors during their seventh- and eighth-grade years. This project highlights the connections and relationships that the mentors

made to school and school staff through the mentoring program. This study's GCM methodology provided youth mentors the opportunity to discuss, interpret, and make meaning of the collective data provided. The focus question asked former mentors about the associations and connections to school, teachers, and friends experienced during their participation in the Wiz Kidz program.

Participants' awareness of the influence they had on mentees was a central theme observed through this investigation. From the moment they volunteered for their roles, the facilitator communicated the expectation of mentors' responsibility and maturity within the school. The Wiz Kidz program encouraged mentors to model appropriate behavioral conduct, including showing commitment to their studies. Mentors demonstrated these prosocial skills and exercised their leadership roles to encourage the same in the mentees. For example, some mentors were regularly called on by school staff to assist with school assemblies or school safety initiatives; this group of students included the three mentors who participated in the Wiz Kidz for two consecutive years. Two of these three mentors were involved in other leadership programming at school, namely student council. These students may have had a greater interest in school programming initiatives or perhaps benefitted from their social roles within the school. These outcomes are consistent with research that supported peer mentoring as an opportunity for youth to model their identity development (Karcher, 2008) and internalize their social roles (Rhodes, 2002).

Frequent contact with other mentors and mentees in the program may have fostered the mentors' experience of group affiliation. This affiliation closely paralleled research findings that linked participation in group programming with students' broader sense of belonging to school (Karcher et al., 2008). Further, this belonging and connection with school supports a host of protective factors for students, including social and academic benefits (Karcher et al., 2008) and

school staff and peer support (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). This study revealed former mentors' comfort, and arguably continued connection, with their elementary school months and years after graduating, as evidenced by their return to visit staff and students or assist with school functions, such as school plays. Participants commented on the friendships and connections made with their mentees. Mentor/mentee relationships expanded beyond the Wiz Kidz group to the greater school context, where both age groups engaged in the hallways or at recess, and in the community. It is queried if such exchanges would have occurred among the two groups if the program did not exist.

Former youth mentors also revealed improved interpersonal relations with school staff and the program facilitator as a result of their participation. These concepts closely align with the Wiz Kidz program goals to view staff as a source of support in times of need and is fostered by the natural mentoring relationship staff have with students (Portwood & Ayers, 2005). Research on students' connection to school and staff (Karcher, 2005; Pianta, 1992) can be considered an extension of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) is explained as one's experience of improved feelings of connection and belonging to a person or group as a result of regular social contact with others (Ainsworth, 1989; Bandura, 1982). The current investigation highlights the roles of educators as supportive figures to the students in their classes and to students within the broader school. Identified as natural mentors outside of the home (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Luthar, 2006; Portwood & Ayers, 2005), educators may provide additional avenues of social support to students who require it. The positive influence educators can have on their students' sense of safety and social wellbeing can reach beyond the classroom walls; educators are encouraged to seek social programming interventions to engage and support students outside of the classroom.

These improved staff/student relations may have been encouraged through increased exposure to staff, however more research in this area is required. It could be argued that participation in school-based group programming can provide a platform for improved relational development with school staff outside of the classroom, an opportunity not otherwise afforded at school. Further, it is important that social programming support be implemented early in the school year and as soon as developmentally appropriate for youth. Early opportunities for students to develop connections and relationships with school staff can serve as a buffer from the normative decline in connectedness experienced for students over time (Karcher, 2008, 2011). Interestingly, participants had low regard for how they believed school staff perceived their suitability for the mentoring role. Participants may have had confidence in their ability to guide their younger peers without concern for what they believed school staff thought of them. If this is the case, it is imperative that the Wiz Kidz program mentor recruitment process remains volunteer-based and is not influenced by the recommendations of school staff. This research also identified difficulties experienced by mentors within the program, such as experiences of frustration with mentees and struggling to engage mentees in program activities.

Use of GCM provided a platform for the collective thoughts of former youth mentors' reflections on the skills and lessons learned in the program. When mentors were presented with the unique responses to the focus question, they became aware of how their peers had responded. The statements provided by mentors may have resonated with their peers, and perhaps could have provided new concepts to consider when reflecting on the connections and relationships made through mentoring. Former youth mentors reported their awareness of their role model-status demonstrated for their mentees and were observed to internalize their social roles as

leaders within their school. The group affiliation experienced by mentors supported their social connections within the school and friendships with fellow mentors and younger mentees.

2.7 Limitations

Some limitations to this study are noted. First, the study had a small sample size. Although the sample size was sufficient for the methodology used (Kane & Trochim, 2007), its generalizability is limited. This study included mentors from one peer mentoring program; the data may look different if more students were included and/or other programs were investigated. Second, this study may have sampling bias. It is possible that the youth mentors who volunteered their participation in the study viewed the program more favorably than other mentors. For example, the three participants who served in a mentoring role over two consecutive years may have perceived the program more positively than other mentors. Third, because the researcher was also the Wiz Kidz program facilitator, the researcher's dual role may have influenced the participants. Although steps were taken to reduce coercion in recruitment, namely students were required to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating, this cannot be guaranteed as the researcher was known to the participants. Conversely, it is possible that former youth mentors chose not to participate in the study knowing the researcher's dual role.

2.8 Future Directions and Implications for Educational Practice

Participation in peer mentoring programs can provide youth mentors with opportunities to explore their leadership abilities through their role model status to younger mentees (Chan et al., 2013). Programs with a relational focus can encourage mentors to explore both expressive and receptive communication skills required to effectively converse with different generations of people, from young mentees to older school staff. Additionally, opportunities to build relationships with school staff can serve as a source of support for students in times of need

(Pianta, 1992). Educators' demonstration of leadership and caring while serving as program facilitators will further support students' emotional and behavioural regulation (Poulou, 2015) and also encourage students' feelings of belonging within a group context (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Poulou, 2015). With a foundational relationship secured through program affiliation, students may be more inclined to approach the school counsellor-facilitators for assistance with problems they are having. More broadly, participation in programs run by school staff may improve students' likelihood of seeking support simply through increased exposure to staff.

Another school staff-related implication is the program mentor selection process. As evidenced in this study, mentor recruitment may be best continued through a volunteer-based approach. Mentors' assigned low importance to the notion that they required the support of school staff to put their names forth to mentor their younger peers. Instead, mentors believed in their capacities to serve as role models to mentees, regardless of how they believed their teachers perceived them. When provided the opportunity, it appeared that mentors with poor reputations and challenging histories found success in developing their leadership skills through their mentoring roles. Participants' beliefs of how they were perceived by school staff is another area of future research.

Group concept mapping (GCM) is an effective research tool with adult participants (Kane and Trochim, 2007), with more recent evidence showing support for involving children and youth in the interview, sorting, and rating phases of GCM (Nowicki et al., 2014; Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Ewan et al., 2016). Utilizing a small focus group of participants to assist in selecting the clusters can be useful to preserve the participants' interpretations of the results, however, the examination of different cluster solutions can be a confusing and onerous task for children and youth participants (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Thus, during the GCM analysis phase,

it is typical for the researcher to select the final cluster solution based on the analysis output and in collaboration with others from the project planning group (Kane & Trochim, 2007). The choice to involve younger participants in the cluster selection process is made at the researcher's discretion and based on participants' understanding of the group concept mapping process and cluster selection task. Future studies are encouraged to utilize younger participants in the cluster selection process and examine the levels of understanding among children and youth in completing the task.

Researchers are encouraged to gather a better understanding of students' experiences mentoring their younger peers, as well as the mentor-perceived successes and challenges that accompany the role. Future research may investigate frustrations experienced by mentors when trying to engage their mentees. With respect to moving the research forward, future studies may provide school counsellor facilitators a platform to report data associated with programs they run, as many are not connected to agencies that report on mentoring activities (Karcher, 2014).

2.9 Conclusion

This study examined former youth mentors' reflections on the connections and relationship made through mentoring their younger peers. Examined through a student-school staff attachment relationship (Pianta, 1992) lens, the Wiz Kidz program encourages a connection to school staff, and the school itself, for students to identify with, feel a sense of belonging, and receive support in times of need. Use of GCM in this investigation aided in emphasizing youth mentors' insights into their experiences. Former youth mentors discussed themes of perceived improvements in communicating with younger students, as well as their awareness of their influential role model status. Mentors also discussed their experience of group affiliation and improved interpersonal relations made with mentees, fellow mentors, and school staff as a result

of participation. This study supports a growing body of research that highlights the relational gains experienced by youth who serve as mentors to their younger peers.

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3. Chapter Three: Fostering Relationships at School: Educators' Evaluations of Former Youth Mentor Program Experiences[2]

Educators, including teachers, school administrators, and counselling support staff, frequently face the challenge of addressing students' social or emotional needs that pose as barriers to learning at school. First and foremost, educators serve as influential supports and role models for their students (Hallinan, 2008; Hughes, 2012; Murray, Kosty, & Hauser-McLean, 2016). Students' experiences of caring and encouragement from their educators as well as the provision of a safe and secure school atmosphere can shape students' attitudes towards school (Hallinan, 2008). Students who enjoy school become more engaged in school-based initiatives that can further their development of improved friendships, social skills, and prosocial and academic success (Hallinan, 2008; Murray et al., 2016). Educators who facilitate social and leadership-enhancing programming within schools can provide opportunities for improved student relationships with peers and educators. However, student/educator interactions have traditionally been studied within the classroom context (Hughes, 2012). There is much to be learned of the processes required to improve students' relationships with educators (Murray et al., 2016) outside of the classroom. The current study encourages educators to look beyond their roles as communicators of curricula to consider the expansive social influence they have on students both inside and outside the classroom.

Peer mentoring programs are an example of school-based initiatives that bring older and younger peers together to foster social skill and leadership development outside of the classroom. Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) is an elementary school peer mentoring program facilitated by school educators in a shared school space, such as the gymnasium. The program is run during the

[2] Currently Under Review with *Teacher Development Journal*.

lunch hour and provides grades seven and eight youth mentors with leadership experience in assisting their grade two and three mentees with companionship and social support. The program aims to foster a sense of responsibility and group connection as well as encourages a sense of belongingness to school. However, studies examining the youth mentor perspective are few and far between, as most mentors involved in mentoring programming are older adolescents or adults. In addition, analyses of the youth program experience as interpreted by adult facilitators are also rare. In our previous study, group concept mapping (Kane & Trochim, 2007) was used as a youth-friendly participatory research method (Nowicki, Brown & Dare, 2017) for our analysis of data provided by former youth mentors. Mentors reflected on the connections and relationships made in the Wiz Kidz program, two to four years after participation (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). Using group concept mapping (Kane & Trochim, 2007) methodology, the current study invited elementary school educators to interpret data provided by former Wiz Kidz youth mentors, because educators, too, are considered stakeholders in the school-based mentoring experience. We asked, how do educators who work with and facilitate school programming for older elementary students interpret the youth mentoring experience? Educators' interpretations of the youth mentoring experience need to be understood to inform future practices.

3.1 Students Connecting at School

A relationship with at least one caring adult, not necessarily a parent, is one of the most important protective factors for youth (Bandura, 2008; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Although typically not as relationally exclusive and durable as primary caregivers (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012), other adults such as grandparents, educators, and neighbours may satisfy as "parent surrogates" (Ainsworth, 1989, p.711) and secondary attachment figures for children who have not found

security in their principal caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1988; Zajac & Kobak, 2006). Youth identify educators as mentors outside of the home (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005) whose increased availability and supervision at school can serve as a natural mentoring relationship (Luthar, 2006; Portwood & Ayers, 2005). In this way, school-based relationships support students' connection to school through belongingness (Karcher, 2011). When a youth feels a sense of belongingness to school, they are more invested in their education, see themselves as part of the school's success, and value the relationships and institutions where they experience these connections (Karcher, Holcomb, & Zambrano, 2008). In the current study, the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program was chosen for its focus on students' engagement as active members in their schools and on its encouragement to view school as a place of safety in times of need.

3.1.1 Students connecting with educators. Upon entry to school, Hamre and Pianta (2006) described the reliance of young children on their teachers to provide understanding and support in daily classroom interactions. Children who form close bonds with their teachers enjoy school more and get along better with peers. Such positive relationships with teachers can serve as a secure base where children are able to engage on their own, knowing their teacher will identify and respond when they need assistance (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Healthy teacher/student relationships can buffer the negative consequences experienced by children exposed to adversity, such as maltreatment, divorce, and trauma (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Zajac & Kobak, 2006).

Lynch and Cicchetti's (1992) seminal study echoed the notion of teachers as non-familial adults who spend considerable time throughout the year with children and function as alternative or secondary attachment figures. Further, these alternative attachment figures may be especially helpful in providing security for children from stressful family environments. Compared to other

children, children from stressful home environments held a preoccupation of needs for safety, love, and acceptance from their teachers. This research identified the importance of teachers' understanding of their roles as secondary attachment figures. More broadly, when teachers and school staff adequately respond to the relational needs of maltreated children, they foster a positive relationship that could further contribute to children's resilience, including their engagement in school (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992). For example, in an investigation of over 900 Canadian students between grades seven and ten from low-income backgrounds, Guay, Denault, and Renauld (2017) found students demonstrated interest in participating in school programming for personal enjoyment and feelings of attachment to the school. Conversely, students' emotional and behavioural difficulties and lack of educational engagement were associated with their perceptions of teachers' disregard, dissatisfaction, and use of sarcasm in the classroom (Poulou, 2015; Strati, Schmidt, & Maier, 2017). Interestingly, research by Phillippo and Stone (2013) found teachers' social and emotional support of students were positively correlated with teachers' perceptions of their efficacy beyond solely teaching curricula (e.g., Althauser, 2015; Lee & Smith, 1999). Further, teachers' increase in the frequency of interactions with students can contribute to students' social and emotional success at school (Graham, Powell, Thomas, & Anderson, 2017; Phillippo & Stone, 2013).

The aforementioned studies (Guay, Denault, and Renauld, 2017; Lynch and Cicchetti, 1992; Phillippo and Stone, 2013) highlight the importance of students' relationships with their teachers as part of their interpersonal development and teachers' roles in providing prosocial engagement opportunities to build relational connections between students and their schools. The current study sought to extend beyond students' relationships with teachers and include other educators within schools, such as administrators and support staff. In Coyne-Foresi and

Nowicki's (2020) study, former youth mentors identified their improved relationships with school staff through participation in the Wiz Kidz program. In an effort to understand the provision of these dyadic relationships through school programming, the current study sought elementary educators' interpretations of data provided by youth mentors on the relationships and connections made from participation in a peer mentoring program.

3.1.2 Educators' roles in fostering students' connection within school. Educators who use attachment-based communication strategies, such as emotional accessibility and warmth, encourage students' secure relationships and positive adjustment at school (Hughes, 2012; Pianta, 1999). Other theoretical models that solely focus on educators' social support and guidance, such as assistance with gathering information, solving problems, or processing stressful events, are less effective than attachment-based strategies in supporting student/educator relationships (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Hughes, 2012; Murray et al., 2016).While Hughes (2012) argued that "we know enough" (p.319) to increase educators' provision of positive classroom learning environments, Murray et al., (2016) contended that not enough is known about intervention strategies to support building student/educator relationships.

Teachers and support personnel, such as educational assistants, are often in the role of facilitating additional school programming to encourage student engagement, whereas school administrators are in the role of keeping abreast of such programs and the students they serve. Educators can further encourage students' connections to both staff and peers at school by providing opportunities to create relationships through social programming outside of the classroom. Thus, in current study, the exploration of educators' interpretations of data provided by former youth mentors sought to close a gap in the literature on how program stakeholders conceptualize the youth mentoring experience.

3.2 Connecting through Social Programming

One way to engage students at school is through school-based extracurricular activities. Such programming can provide students additional opportunities to improve their communication and interpersonal skills while expanding the educational influence of the educators serving as program facilitators (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016). Student participation in social programming initiatives can provide exposure to new experiences (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016) and developmental processes (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008) not otherwise afforded in the classroom. One such example of a school-based elementary program is the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program (Coyne-Foresi, 2015).

3.2.1 Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program. Wiz Kidz is an elementary school-level program rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) that fosters students' connections to their schools and to the supportive people within them (Pianta, 1992). The 34-week program spans the school year with weekly sessions of guided mentor/mentee discussions and participation in whole-group games with a relational and collaborative focus. Grades seven and eight youth mentor volunteers are provided with two hours of training that covers topics such as confidentiality, communication, and engagement prior to being matched with a mentee. The program facilitator, in collaboration with school staff, selects grade two and three student mentees who would benefit from social support at school. Mentees are then matched with an older peer based on perceived compatibility. The program facilitator then provides weekly 15-minute group supervision meetings with mentors to discuss concerns and offer solutions and support.

Traditionally, the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program is facilitated by a school counsellor who has specialized training to address sensitive issues, such as child-protective

matters, and can employ the necessary resources to support children experiencing adversity. In addition to providing support of basic needs, school counsellor facilitators can identify teaching moments to improve communication between the mentor and mentee matches, encourage a strengths-based perspective, and focus on what the mentor or mentee has control over in his/her environment. However, as school counsellors are not deployed in all schools, this study sought to broaden the scope of future peer mentoring program facilitation and include educators with experience working with older elementary school students.

3.2.2 Educators' understanding of the youth experience. Children and youth are now more frequently involved in research that they are expected to benefit from (Langhout & Thomas, 2010; Ozer, 2017; Vaughn, Wagner, & Jacquez, 2013). In Coyne-Foresi and Nowicki's (2020) study, we learned of the Wiz Kidz former youth mentor experience pertaining to the relationships and connections made through the program; however, the perspective of educators had been missing. The current study sought to include the ideas of educators, as potential program facilitators, to interpret youth experiences mentoring their younger peers. For example, while educators may believe they accurately understand the student experience, Nowicki, Brown, and Dare's (2017) research showed that students may not conceptualize a given construct as adults think they do. In their investigation of students' perceptions of their classmates with intellectual or learning disabilities, educators were asked to analyze data from grades five and six students' interviews from an earlier study (Nowicki, Brown, & Stepien, 2014). Group concept mapping analysis of the students' statements that were sorted by adults showed discrepancies among the adults' and students' interpretations of the data, revealing that students did not understand why social exclusion occurs as adults thought they did. These findings exposed a future direction for inclusive programming implementation (Nowicki et al., 2014; Nowicki et al.,

2017). Another study compared students' and teachers' perceptions of school climate and its influence on academics. Survey data in Mitchell, Bradshaw and Leaf's (2010) investigation of grade five students and their teachers found discrepancies in both groups' perceptions. Teachers' perceptions of school climate were heavily influenced by classroom-level factors, such as disruptive students and poor classroom management; whereas, students' perceptions of school climate were influenced by school-level factors, such as principal turnover and student/teacher relationships. The authors emphasized the importance of utilizing the perspectives of all school member representatives, including staff *and* students, to inform future school improvement initiatives (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Thus, previous research confirms the importance of gathering all stakeholders' perspectives on the school-based social programming to ensure effective and relevant program implementation. Although program facilitators have the advantage of a "front row seat" in witnessing student engagement and skill-building offered through peer mentoring programs, they may not accurately perceive the program experiences in the same way as students. These examples highlight the necessity of gaining the perspectives of both former Wiz Kidz youth mentors' reflections and educators' conceptualizations to gather a more complete understanding of the youth experience and how best to enhance their relational and skill-building needs.

3.3 The Current Study

Coyne-Foresi and Nowicki (2020) investigated former youth mentors' reflections of the connections and relationships made through the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) peer mentoring program. Group concept mapping (Kane & Trochim, 2007) is a useful methodology for engaging children in research because it recognizes their contributions as stakeholders in their experiences (Nowicki et al., 2017). As a mixed method, group concept mapping utilizes the investigative

nature of qualitative inquiry with generalizable quantitative methods (Andrew & Halcomb, 2006). Group concept mapping (Kane & Trochim, 2007) first involves the selection of a study focus, followed by the contribution of stakeholders' ideas on the topic through interviews. Unique statements are extracted from the interviews and returned to the participants for sorting and rating of importance. The data is inputted to the Concept System Global MAX (Concept Systems Incorporated, 2017) software for multidimensional scaling and subsequent cluster analysis. Multidimensional scaling creates a visual display that shows each statement's spatial relationship with the others, and hierarchical cluster analysis defines boundaries around clusters of conceptually related statements. Finally, the researchers interpret the maps and consider the statistical fit and underlying themes of clusters in response to the focal question (Kane & Trochim, 2007, p. 9). The results can be used to inform future programming. Former youth mentors in Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki's (2020) investigation sorted interview data into three main themes: (a) reflections on mentors' improved communications skills and perspective-taking with others, (b) mentors' relationships with their mentees, including awareness of their social responsibilities as role models, and (c) mentors' reflections of their relational connections with school staff.

As stakeholders in school-based social programming, educators who were experienced in working with older elementary students were invited to interpret data provided by former youth mentors through group concept mapping. The results from the educators were anticipated to differ in two ways from the data sorted by former youth mentors (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). First, it was expected that educators would utilize more complex sorting strategies when reviewing youth-provided data, resulting in more thematic categorization than that of the youth mentor sample. Beyond differences in age, educators' teaching and reflective practices have the

potential to provide them with a more advanced conceptual framework of understanding the complexities of the lived experience (Hughes, 2012; Jacobson & Wilensky, 2006; Poulou, 2015). Second, educators have a strong invested interest in creating and maintaining relationships with students to support students' academic and prosocial competencies (Hughes, 2012; Murray et al., 2016). Educators were also asked to rate statements generated by former youth mentors on importance. As stakeholders in school-based programming, group concept mapping was used to gather educators' interpretations of data that examined the relationships and connections made by youth mentors in the Wiz Kidz program (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020).

3.3.1 Method

3.3.1.1 Participants. Fifteen elementary school educators participated in the study, including four principals, five grade eight teachers, one grade seven teacher, two grade six teachers, one learning support teacher, one rotary teacher, and one educational assistant; eight participants were male, seven were female. Teachers, school administrators, and support staff were recruited based on their experience working with older elementary school-aged children (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). Participants had been educators for a range of 1 to 30 years, with an average of 18.46 years of experience (*SD* = 8.57). Thirteen participants were from different schools; two educators worked at the same school.

3.3.1.2 Materials. Seventy-seven statements were printed on individual pieces of cardstock and given to each participant for sorting. The same statements were listed on a sheet of paper for rating. Statements were taken from Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki's (2020) study of former youth mentors that focused on the relationships and connections made with peers and school staff through participation in the Wiz Kidz program and asked, "When you think about what happened for you in the Wiz Kidz program, how would you describe the relationships and

connections you made at school, at home, or in the community, or elsewhere?". Former youth mentors provided data during their grades 10 and 11 years, reflective of their experience mentoring their younger peers when in grades seven and eight. In the Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki (2020) study, responses to the focus question were extracted from the interview transcript, entered into a spreadsheet, and reviewed by two researchers; repetitive and redundant statements were removed. Each of the remaining 77 statements (Table 3-1) represented a unique idea. Statements were given to the educator participants with instructions to sort the statements in any way that makes sense. They were asked to provide a name for each pile they created. Table 3-1 indicates the statements in each cluster as well as statement bridging indices and importance ratings. Participants were also given a sheet of paper with all statements listed to rate the importance of each statement using a scale of 1 to 5, where a value of 1 = "not important," 2 = "somewhat important," 3 = moderately important," 4 = very important," and 5 = "extremely important."

3.3.1.3 Procedure. We obtained ethics approval from our university's ethic review board. Each participant provided their informed consent. The first author distributed Letters of Information and Consent through a purposeful sampling strategy (Palinkas et al., 2015) to former colleagues serving as active elementary-school educators who were experienced in working with older elementary school-aged youth (i.e. grades six through eight). Purposeful sampling is a widely used technique used in qualitative research (Patton, 2002) and useful in identifying and selecting individuals who are knowledgeable, experienced, and take interest in a particular area (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015). Educators, including teachers of grades

Table 3-1. Statements for Each Cluster, Importance Ratings, and Statement Bridging Indices

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
Cluster 1: Skills Mentors Learned in the Peer Mentoring Program		**4.01**	**0.23**
43	I learned a different mindset to understand how to connect with people.	4.60	0.10
44	I can communicate with kids and adults better because it's given me background on how to talk to both age groups.	4.53	0.18
69	I feel like I'm more open since the program, and now am more outgoing.	4.47	0.10
77	The skills I learned from the program actually helped me get my job.	4.47	0.33
16	Being in the program has helped with my connections.	4.33	0.00
75	I became more responsible with how I dealt with my situation at home with my parents and siblings especially because we fought a lot.	4.33	0.58
39	The program made me realize that I'm not the only person and that there are a lot of people that need help.	4.20	0.03
58	The program has helped me become aware that not everyone will have the same attitude towards things as I do.	4.07	0.08
53	I've learned how to take a step back to consider how my younger family member is feeling.	4.00	0.51
45	Kids are very enthusiastic about things, and that has helped me become enthusiastic about things too.	3.93	0.21
51	The mentoring experience made it easier for me to work in a group.	3.93	0.14
74	The relationship between the facilitator and I changed a lot because after joining it opened the door to talk more about anything that I had going on in my life.	3.93	0.18
48	I now take into consideration who I'm talking to and how they'll understand better what's going on.	3.87	0.03
52	I've realized that my younger family members process information differently.	3.67	0.84
41	I grew closer to some of my friends.	3.60	0.25
46	The program has helped me in giving direction and giving clear instructions on how to do the activities we did together.	3.60	0.18
64	Before the program, I was not a big fan of talking to other people.	3.47	0.08
3	It was a new experience talking to people I normally wouldn't have talked to.	3.27	0.27

Table 3-1. (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
Cluster 2: Mentors' Relationships with School and Staff		**3.66**	**0.61**
21	Being in the program helped me listen to people better, listen to their opinions, and understand what they're trying to say.	4.60	0.25
76	The year after the program, I got a job in my community as a junior leader in an after school program.	4.33	0.62
68	If you respect school staff, they will respect you back and it's cool seeing that side of them.	4.20	0.81
56	The program has helped me in high school in trying to befriend some of my teachers and being able to talk to them about things.	4.13	0.48
63	I came from a different school, so being in the program made me feel more welcome in the school environment and made me feel really at home.	4.13	0.50
67	I was really scared of teachers, but after the program I saw that they are just there to help you.	4.07	0.39
36	The program helped mentors bond together.	4.00	0.30
70	All the teachers knew that I was responsible.	3.93	0.71
54	The program gave me more respect for the school staff that deals with younger children.	3.87	0.63
55	Because of the experience, I got to talk with the teachers and facilitator one-on-one and gain a better understanding for the professional relationships between teachers and students.	3.87	0.60
28	I loved my elementary school and loved being involved with it.	3.80	0.72
34	I connected with the facilitator and got to know him/her better, otherwise I wouldn't have talked to him/her in the first place.	3.73	0.45
25	I would talk about the program with the other mentors.	3.60	0.46
30	My parents were really interested to know if the mentees were okay and if my friends were okay.	3.60	0.98
71	If the school needed someone to help with the younger kids, they were always asking me.	3.60	0.78
27	I like that school staff viewed me differently when I was a mentor.	3.53	0.61
29	My parents would ask me about the program and about my mentee.	3.53	1.00
62	The staff thought of me still as a mentor and I thought that was kind of cool.	3.53	0.57
20	The vice principal thought the program was a good thing and was glad that there were people helping others in the building.	3.47	0.49
26	My role as a mentor made me look more mature and involved in the school to school staff.	3.47	0.60

Table 3-1. (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
19	School staff were interested in the program and want to hear more about it.	3.33	0.49
49	I looked to the other mentors for help because of my lack of experience with younger children.	3.27	0.67
33	I felt like my mentee's parents weren't really there for him/her, he/she just wanted me to be there for him/her.	2.93	0.74
14	I return to my elementary school to assist with the school show.	2.67	0.71
18	School staff didn't expect me to be in the program.	2.33	0.78
Cluster 3: Mentors' Experiences in the Peer Mentoring Program		**3.56**	**0.32**
1	I made relationships in the group.	4.47	0.20
40	I try to help others and give them somebody to talk to if they need it.	4.47	0.28
4	The program was welcoming.	4.20	0.22
5	You could express yourself in your own way.	4.20	0.12
7	Everyone was genuinely kind to each other.	3.80	0.52
8	All your stress was let go and you could talk about anything.	3.53	0.16
38	We all worked together for a purpose, like the time the gym floor was lava and we had to figure out how to cross using only mats.	3.47	0.29
42	The program was fun.	3.40	0.14
65	Kids used to scare me but having a mentee was cool and opened my eyes to know they're not that bad.	3.40	0.56
6	You could find similarities between you and other people.	3.27	0.23
35	I learned about age gaps and that sometimes it doesn't matter, you can still be friends with the mentees.	3.07	0.63
9	You could spend time with other people.	2.87	0.38
50	Some mentors had more experience than I did.	2.13	0.43
Cluster 4: Mentors' Relationships with Mentees		**3.56**	**0.28**
22	I had a strong relationship with my mentee.	4.53	0.06
24	When I return to my elementary school, my mentee remembers me and is so excited to see me.	4.07	0.56
32	I feel like a good person and am happy to see my mentee when I return to my elementary school.	4.07	0.48
37	We knew we were role models to the mentees.	4.00	0.23

Table 3-1. (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
13	My mentee and I would talk if he/she was having trouble with friends.	3.93	0.11
31	My mentee was really excited to be in the program, and I was excited to be there with them.	3.93	0.08
60	After I came back to my elementary school one day, it was really impactful when my mentee saw me, broke down crying, and hugged me saying that he/she never thought he/she'd see me again.	3.93	0.45
72	Some of the children that were in the program who live in my community constantly talk to me, asking me what to do or how to handle situations they're in.	3.93	0.32
73	It's nice being able to the mentees years later, see how they how they've been doing, what they've been up to, how they've changed in their lives, and how they've overcome obstacles that they were facing.	3.87	0.53
2	I made friends with the mentees.	3.80	0.24
61	Realizing I made an impact in my mentee was cool.	3.80	0.23
57	I remember being frustrated with my mentee's quirks and didn't know how to make a connection with her, and have learned that everyone learns differently.	3.73	0.62
47	I had to explain things in a different way so the mentees could understand.	3.53	0.22
66	Whenever I would see the other mentors at recess, we would always have that one connection through the program.	3.40	0.33
23	My mentee would run from his/her class to give me a hug or wave to me.	3.33	0.29
15	The former mentees are comfortable around me when I volunteer at the elementary school because we used to spend time together in the program.	3.27	0.32
11	My mentee was comfortable with me, we would goof around and be silly.	3.07	0.09
10	My mentee was shy at first, and near the end was open with me.	2.93	0.08
59	Sometimes my mentee didn't want to come to the program and sometimes refused to talk to me which was difficult.	2.87	0.35
12	My mentee and I made a handshake between the two of us.	2.40	0.13
17	My mentee and I would talk about the games in the program.	2.40	0.21

Note. Bolded values indicate averages of the respective cluster's content.

six, seven, and eight classrooms, school administrators, and support staff who work directly with older elementary school-aged youth were invited to participate. Nine educators were approached and agreed to participate. Participants were given additional Letters of Information for distribution to their colleagues; six additional educators, unknown to the study authors, contacted the research team with interest in the study and consented to participate.

Materials were given to each participant. The first author met each participant at a place of convenience to complete the sorting and rating activities. Four participants met the researcher in pairs, although they sorted and rated the data independently; the other 11 participants completed the activities individually. The sorting and rating tasks for this paper's focal question took between 20 and 62 minutes, with an average of 36.13 minutes (*SD* = 11.41 minutes). Each participant received a $10 gift certificate as compensation for their time.

3.3.1.4 Data analysis procedure. The data sorted and rated by participants were entered into and analyzed with Concept Systems Incorporated (Version 233.21, 2017) software. Multidimensional scaling uses individual proximity matrices that are summed to create a proximity matrix. The results of the multidimensional scaling are represented by a two-dimensional point map, showing each statement's spatial location relative to the other statements. A stress value is calculated to indicate how well the point map fits the sorted data. This value ranges from 0 and 1, where 0 represents a perfect fit and values closer to 1 represents a poor fit (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Nowicki & Brown, 2015). The stress value was 0.272, which fell within the acceptable range of 0.205 and 0.365 (Kane & Trochim, 2007, pg. 98).

Next, a hierarchical cluster analysis grouped conceptually related statements. A series of iterations are conducted until all statements are included in one cluster. The boundary lines around the clusters differ between iterations but the data points on the map do not change

(Nowicki & Brown, 2015). A bridging index is calculated for each statement where values closer to 0 designate the statement was sorted more frequently with other statements in close proximity on the map and values closer to 1 indicates that the statement was sorted with statements further apart on the map or may have been difficult to sort (Kane & Trochim, 2007; Nowicki & Brown, 2015). Following independent review of a range of solutions between two and six clusters, the study authors decided on a four-cluster solution that demonstrated distinct themes. Cluster labels were determined using labels suggested by participants and researchers' interpretation of the statements within each cluster.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Concept mapping summaries. The educators' concept map revealed the following four key concepts: (a) Skills Mentors Learned in the Peer Mentoring Program (*M* bridging index = 0.23; 18 statements), (b) Mentors' Relationships with School and Staff (*M* bridging index = 0.61; 25 statements), (c) Mentors' Experiences in the Peer Mentoring Program (*M* bridging index = 0.32; 13 statements), and (d) Mentors' Relationships with Mentees (*M* bridging index = 0.28; 21 statements) (Figure 3-1).

The stress value for the educators' concept map was 0.272 compared to the youths' concept map stress value of 0.294. The stress values indicate that educators sorted the former youth mentors' statements in a somewhat more consistent way than the youth did; however, educators' conceptualization of the data differed from Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki's (2020) study with former youth mentors that produced a three-cluster map. Table 3-1 shows the average bridging values and importance ratings for each statement, grouped by cluster, as interpreted by educators. Average bridging values for individual statements ranged between 0 and 1. Average

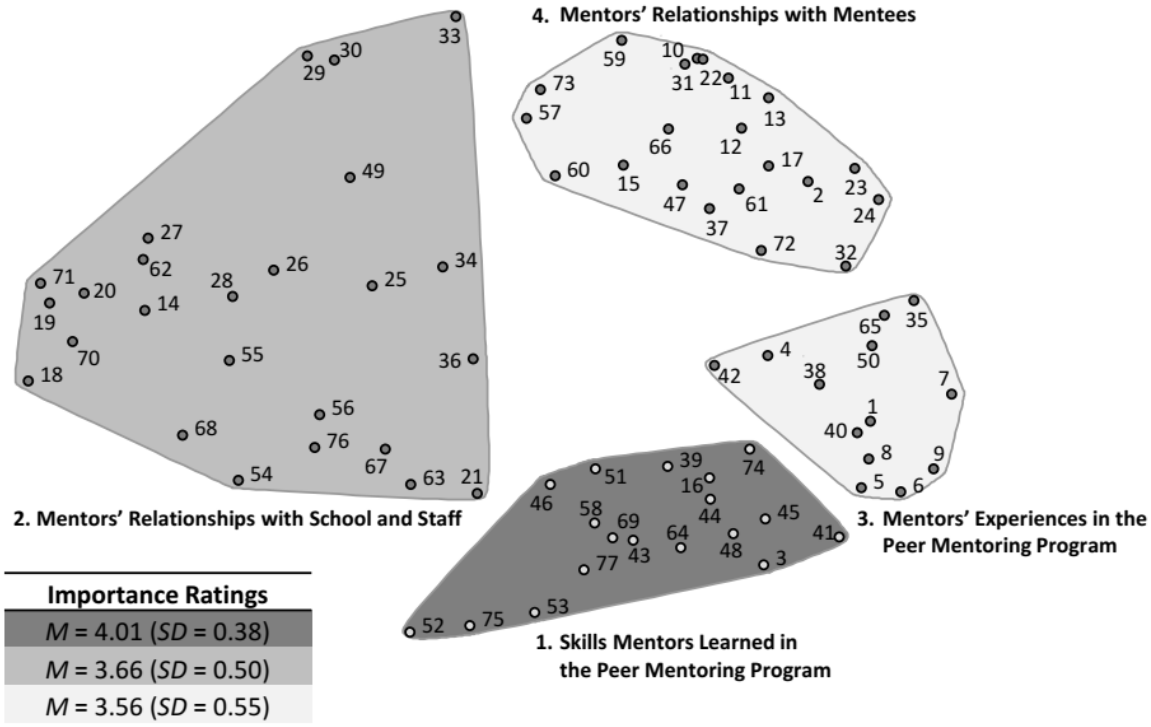

Figure 3-1. Concept map for the four-cluster solution showing spatial relationship between 77 generated statements.
Note. Statements are labeled by number (see Table 3-1 for a list of the statements and their reference numbers). Clusters are shaded dark to light per importance, where darker shading denotes higher mean importance rating.

importance ratings for clusters ranged between 3.56 and 4.01. Importance ratings for statements ranged from 2.13 to 4.60 (see Table 3-1). Educators rated 24 of the 77 (31%) statements as highly important (≥4.00). Statements with the highest mean ratings (≥4.00) were found in all four clusters.

Educators consistently rated the importance of each statement higher than students (58 of 77 statements; 75.3%); interestingly, only two statements (Statements 22 and 44) were rated highly important (≥4.00) by *both* educators and former youth mentors. Viewed another way, educators rated 31.1% of statements as highly important (≥4.00) whereas 14.3% of statements were rated as highly important by former youth mentors (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020).

3.4.1.1 Cluster 1: Skills mentors learned in the peer mentoring program. This cluster was sorted with the highest degree of consistency by participants (*M* bridging index = 0.23) and rated as most important (*M* = 4.01, *SD* = 0.38), with statement importance ratings ranging from 3.27 to 4.60. This cluster contained the only statement in the data set with a bridging index of 0.00 (Statement 16, "Being in the program has helped with my connections"). Statements 39 and 48 in this cluster had the lowest bridging values (≤ 0.05). Educators rated half of the statements in this cluster (*n* = 9) as highly important (≥ 4.00; Statements 16, 39, 43, 44, 53, 58, 69, 75, and 77).

Statements in this cluster reflected former youth mentors' communication and perspective-taking skills learned through the mentoring program that lent to improved relationships both at school and at home. There was agreement in how educators and former youth mentors interpreted the interpersonal skills mentors learned through the program. Of the 18 statements in this cluster, 16 statements (Statements 3, 16, 39, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 51, 52, 53, 58, 69, 75, and 77) were previously sorted into a 26-statement cluster by former youth

mentors labelled "Communication Skills" which focused on improved interpersonal skills to build relationships (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020).

3.4.1.2 Cluster 2: Mentors' relationships with school and staff. This cluster had an average importance rating of 3.66 (*SD* = 0.50) with average statement ratings ranging from 2.33 to 4.60. This cluster was the largest of the four clusters with 25 statements and reflected former youth mentors' engagement with school staff. Educators and former youth mentors demonstrated a high degree of consistency in how they sorted these statements (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020); former youth mentors sorted 20 of the 25 statements into a cluster labelled "Connections with School and Staff" (Statements 14, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 49, 54, 55, 62, 63, 67, 68, 70, 71, and 76) (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020) which focused on mentors' interactions with school staff and peers. Although there was high conceptual agreement among educators and youth mentors, educators sorted this cluster with the least degree of consistency (*M* bridging index = 0.61). Further, statements in the cluster contained high bridging values, indicating the statements were not sorted together consistently by educators. For example, this cluster contained the only statement in the data set with a 1.00 bridging value (Statement 29, "My parents would ask me about the program and about my mentee,") suggestive that the statement was sorted with different statements by educators or perhaps was difficult to categorize.

Statement 21 was the second of two highest-rated statements in the data set (4.60) and reflected former youth mentors' dyadic communication skills, as interpreted by educators: "Being in the program helped me listen to people better, listen to their opinions, and understand what they're trying to say." Seven statements (28%) in this cluster were rated as highly important (≥ 4.00) (Statements 21, 36, 56, 63, 67, 68, and 76).

3.4.1.3 Cluster 3: Mentors' experiences in the peer mentoring program. This cluster was the smallest with 13 statements and reflected former youth mentors' thoughts about participating in a group setting. Educators sorted the statements in this cluster with moderately-high consistency (*M* bridging index = 0.32); conversely, former youth mentors did not sort these statements together in a conceptually organized way (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). In the current study, this cluster had an average importance rating of 3.56 (*SD* = 0.65) with average statement ratings ranging from 2.13 to 4.47. Four statements (30.7%) in this cluster were rated as highly important (≥ 4.00) (Statements 1, 4, 5, and 40.)

3.4.1.4 Cluster 4: Mentors' relationships with mentees. This cluster had importance ratings ranging from 2.40 to 4.53, with an average importance rating of 3.56 (*SD* = 0.55). Themes within the cluster focused on educators' interpretation of former youth mentors' perceptions of themselves as role models to their mentees, and their roles in bonding with and supporting their younger peers. Educators grouped 21 statements in this cluster and sorted the statements with a high degree of consistency (*M* bridging index = 0.28). This cluster had a high degree of overlap with the youth mentors' cluster labelled "Relationships with Mentees" (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). Nineteen of 21 statements overlapped among the educator and former youth mentor data sets (Statements 2, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 22, 23, 24, 31, 32, 37, 59, 60, 61, 66, 72, and 73). Four statements (9.5%) in this cluster were rated as highly important (≥ 4.00) (Statements 22, 24, 32, and 37).

3.5 Discussion

This study examined elementary school educators' interpretations of data provided by youth from Coyne-Foresi and Nowicki's (2020) study that examined former youth mentors' reflections on the relationship and connections made with others through participation in a

school-based peer mentoring program. The stress value in the current study was slightly lower than the data interpreted by youth (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020) and indicated a marginal difference in how educators sorted the youth mentor data compared to the youth. The two groups demonstrated overlap in how they sorted the 77 statements with 55 of 77 statements (71.4%) sorted into similar categories.

Clusters 1, 2, and 4 in this study closely overlapped with the youths' categorizations in Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki's (2020) study. Cluster 1, "Skills Mentors Learned in the Peer Mentoring Program," contained a high degree of overlap with the data sorted by youth. Educators' selection of statements in Cluster 1 reflected themes of former youth mentors' perspective-taking, consideration for others, and appreciation of others' differences. Educators take special interest in their students' development of these interpersonal and social skills to support their learning (Hallinan, 2008; Hughes, 2006; Murray et al., 2016). Further, educators' provision of school programming outside of the classroom can expose students to additional experiences and developmental processes (Gardner et al., 2008; Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016). Cluster 4, "Mentors' Relationships with Mentees," contained the highest degree of overlap with the data interpreted by former youth mentors. This cluster reflected educators' interpretation of mentors' bonding with their mentees, providing social support to their mentees and mentors' perceptions of themselves as role models. These themes that highlight youth mentors' abilities to communicate with, relate to (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016), and assist their younger peers within their schools and communities are of importance to educators who seek strategies to build students' empathy and engagement.

Statements in Cluster 2, "Mentors' Relationships with School and Staff," consistently overlapped with the data provided by youth (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). A defining theme

in Cluster 2 was educators' perceptions of former youth mentors' engagement with school staff while participating in the peer mentoring program. Many statements in this clusters reflected mentors' appreciation for school staff and reflected their improved relationships with the program facilitator. Students' comfort and ability to reach out and connect with educators at school can enhance their social and academic success; importantly, educators who recognize their roles as social support figures to students can better address their needs (Lynch & Ciccetti, 1992). For example, educators' use of attachment-based strategies to relate with students, including emotional accessibility and responsiveness (Hughes, 2012; Pianta, 1999), has been found to encourage student connection to school staff (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Involving students in school-based extracurricular programming provides evidence of their improved connection to school (Guay et al., 2017) and may support an intervention strategy to foster relationships among students and their educators that Murray and colleagues' (2016) believed was needed.

Cluster 3, "Mentors' Experiences in the Peer Mentoring Program," was an additional cluster interpreted by educators sorting youth data that was otherwise not identified by the youth participants (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020). Educators demonstrated more complex sorting strategies and use of more thematic categories (Jacobson & Wilensky, 2006). Statements sorted by educators in this cluster reflected themes of mentors' general experiences in the program, engagement with their mentees, descriptions of program activities, and participation in a group format. Statements focused on the lived experiences, games played, and lessons learned from working with younger children. Educators may have perceived these action-related statements as categorically different from the relationship- and skill-related themes noted among the other clusters.

A key discrepancy between the educators' and mentors' data sets is the overall higher statement importance ratings as interpreted by educators. Educators emphasized the intra- and interpersonal development that peer mentoring programming can provide students. This confirmed our hypothesis that educators' ratings of statements would be higher than the youths' ratings and is perhaps reflective of educators' strong investment in fostering relationships with their students to support their academic and social success (Hughes, 2012; Murray et al., 2016). Educators' life experience and maturity may support their recognition of their roles beyond teacher who deliver academic curricula but also as role models who contribute to their students' growth into productive and prosocial citizens.

When examining programming, especially for children and youth, it is necessary to gather the perspectives of all program stakeholders (Hughes, 2012; Poulou, 2015). The current study aligns with other studies that have shown discrepancies in differing stakeholders' experiences (i.e., Dare et al., 2019; Nowicki et al., 2017; Nowicki et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2010). However, the consistency in which educators and youth sorted the statements suggests that the two groups conceptualized the youth experience of relationship-building and connecting though mentoring in a similar way.

The current study research highlights educators' recognition of themselves as supportive figures to the students in their classes and within the broader school. Educators who seek opportunities to engage students outside of the classroom may provide additional avenues of social support to a targeted group of students who require it, and perhaps reach students within the group whom educators did not know needed support. For example, mentors discussed their improved relationships as a result of increased exposure to the program facilitator in the mentoring program. Identified as natural mentors outside of the home by youth (Dubois &

Silverthorn, 2005; Luthar, 2006; Portwood & Ayers, 2005), educators' demonstration of social and emotional support of students, in addition to academic support, may contribute to improvements in students' academic achievement (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Educators' positive influences on students can reach beyond study habits and curricula taught in the classroom (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Therefore, educators are encouraged to seek social programming interventions to engage students outside of the classroom.

The current study supports educators' investment in engaging with students and experiencing each other in a small group format outside of the classroom. Through the provision of school-based extracurricular programming, such as that of peer mentoring programs, educators can serve as role models to youth mentors which can translate into students' improved relationships with peers and staff within the school, as well as improved academic achievement (Hallinan, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Murray et al., 2016). Educators are particularly invested in the process of strengthening their relationships with students as part of their greater role as influential figures in their education (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016). In turn, children, too, are invested in their interpersonal and social skill development (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016) at school and may benefit from relating to and learning from educators in an alternative context.

3.6 Limitations and Future Directions

This study had a small sample size that was adequate for group concept mapping methodology (Kane & Trochim, 2007), though its generalizability is limited. Although purposeful sampling is a widely used strategy in qualitative research for selecting a particular group of individuals, such as educators of higher elementary school grades, its use risks low levels of reliability and limits generalizability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, this study reveals many questions for future study. Future research may shed light on the reasons for lower importance ratings of statements for younger populations compared to adult facilitators with use of personal values or maturity inventories. Additionally, differences in conceptualizations and importance ratings among elementary school-aged, high school-aged, and adult mentors may be investigated. Future directions may investigate which career paths those with mentoring experience follow or if former youth mentors participate in other mentoring roles years later.

3.7 Conclusion

The current investigation moves the understanding of youths' roles in mentoring their younger peers forward in several ways. First, an educator/student attachment focus (Pianta, 1992) was used to extend beyond the traditional caregiver/child attachment model described by Bowlby (1988) to emphasize the influential roles educators hold as supportive figures to students' social and emotional wellness at school (Graham et al., 2017; Hallinan, 2008; Hughes, 2012; Murray et al., 2016; Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Educators, too, are considered stakeholders in the peer mentoring program experience. Thus, the current study provides a new question in the field of mentoring that asks how educators conceptualize the youth mentoring experience. Involving former youth mentor and educator program stakeholders in data collection is key to informing program implementation and to understand how program participants experience the program's objectives (Nowicki et al., 2014; Nowicki et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2010). The narrative provided by the Wiz Kidz stakeholders through the group concept mapping process showed a common thread of relating and connecting with others in their lived experience participating in a peer mentoring program.

This study provides insights into the similarities and differences in how educator- and former youth mentor program stakeholders conceptualize the mentoring experience. Feedback on school-based student programming experiences is important to better understand how to engage students. This study found considerable overlap among how educators and former youth mentors thematically sorted the statements, suggestive that the two groups conceptualized the youth mentoring experience similarly. One exception was an additional conceptual cluster created by educators that reflected former youth mentors' active program engagement. Educators' higher importance ratings of statements compared to ratings by former peer mentors suggests educators placed greater value on the experiences school-based group programming can provide student participants. Facilitation of school-based programming outside of the classroom can foster students' social and relational development with both peers as well as the educators who run the program. Understanding how educators conceptualize the youth experience mentoring their younger peers is imperative to informing future peer mentoring program design and delivery. When provided with the opportunity to facilitate in-school social programming for students, educators are encouraged to recognize the importance of their own social roles beyond that of program supervisors. Educators may never know the value their own mentorship means to their students' social and emotional well-being.

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4. Chapter Four: Youth Mentorship: Exploring Long-Term Benefits for Mentors Through Group Concept Mapping[3]

School-based peer mentoring programs bring peers together and foster leadership and social skill development outside of the classroom (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Research shows that mentees in mentoring relationships can experience many beneficial outcomes, such as improved interpersonal skills, increased prosocial behaviour and enhanced feelings of connection to home, school and community (Dubois et al., 2011; Karcher, 2009; King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002; Willis, Bland, Manka, & Craft, 2012). However, the benefits that youth mentors derive from mentoring younger students have seldom been examined (DuBois et al., 2011; Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014), and rarely have these benefits been studied years after program completion. This study uses a unique methodology called group concept mapping (Trochim, 1989) to explore the long-term benefits that youth mentors experience.

We engaged former youth mentors in a group concept mapping process to explore specific skills and lessons learned that youth mentors used as they advanced in their lives. Group concept mapping methodology (Trochim, 1989) centres on the experiences of program stakeholders. This methodology blends quantitative analyses with the exploratory nature of qualitative investigations (Andrew & Halcomb, 2006) and results in a visual display of a group's responses to a focal question (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Group concept mapping is a child- and youth-friendly methodology (Dare & Nowicki, 2019) that utilizes their active participation as program stakeholders. We used this methodology to capture former youth mentors' valuable insights into their experiences mentoring their younger peers.

[3] Currently Under Review with *Evaluation and Program Planning Journal*.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, the peer-reviewed literature reveals little about youth-child mentoring relationships in school settings (Karcher, 2014; Portwood & Ayers, 2005), especially at the elementary-school level. Researchers who have studied peer mentoring typically investigated the experiences of high school-aged youth matched with younger mentees (Herrera, Kauh, Cooney, Grossman, & McMaken, 2008; Karcher, 2005, 2009). Second, few researchers have evaluated the long-term benefits of being a youth mentor; studies involving youth mentors have generally investigated the immediate outcomes of program participation. For example, Karcher (2009) investigated high school-aged mentors and found their participation in the program was associated with improved school-related connectedness and self-esteem as compared to a control group. In the current study, we sought to understand the skill-transfer that occurs *after* youth mentors' program experiences.

4.1 Peer Mentoring in Schools

Peer-reviewed research has shown immediate benefits for mentees in mentoring programs. Students who are mentees in school-based mentoring may experience improved interpersonal skills (DuBois et al., 2011) and connection to a variety of protective factors including the home, school and community (Karcher, 2009; King et al., 2002; Willis et al., 2012). However, outcomes for youth mentors have not been studied to the same extent.

Peer mentoring programs can facilitate new opportunities and experiences for youth mentors not otherwise provided within the school context (Coyne-Foresi, 2015). Utilizing a strengths-based approach to programming (Herrera et al., 2008; Karcher, 2014), mentors may become more aware of their talents and interests through activities that support their identity development (Karcher, 2008). Peer mentoring programs can provide mentors with leadership opportunities within the school that may in turn influence youth mentors' perceptions of

themselves and encourage the internalization of their social roles (Rhodes, 2002). Youth mentors may have just as much to benefit from participation in school-based peer mentoring programs as mentees do. We chose to investigate mentors' experiences in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program because this program focuses on the intra- and interpersonal experiences and benefits for mentors and mentees.

4.1.1 The Wiz Kidz program. The Wiz Kidz program is an elementary school-based peer mentoring program that fosters students' sense of purpose and encourages their sense of responsibility, ability and leadership potential (Coyne-Foresi, 2015). At the beginning of the school year, youth in grades seven and eight who are interested in volunteering for the mentoring role undergo two hours of training before they are matched with a mentee. A mentor manual guides the mentor training and includes case scenarios and exercises to explore themes of mentee engagement, challenges in the mentoring relationships, communication skills and confidentiality. The Wiz Kidz program (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) is supervised by a school counsellor and provides weekly structured and supportive leadership experiences for mentors in grades seven and eight (12 to 14 years of age) as well as companionship and social support for mentees in grades two and three (7 to 9 years of age). The school counsellor facilitates the program and works in collaboration with school staff to identify student mentees in grades two and three who might benefit from one-on-one attention in a supportive group setting. The school counsellor matches youth mentors and younger mentees based on the facilitator's observation of initial connection and compatibility.

The program runs for 34 weeks. Each week, the school counsellor provides structured opportunities for discussion and play, offers mentor/mentee matches direction in discussion and identifies and addresses concerns in the mentoring relationships. The school counsellor also

provides 15-minute weekly group supervision meetings with mentors to discuss any concerns and offer solutions and support for mentee engagement. The Wiz Kidz program applies the principles of positive psychology. Below we describe positive psychology and how it links to the Wiz Kidz program.

4.2 Positive Psychology and the Wiz Kidz Program

Positive psychology aims to make people stronger and supports their achievement of high potential (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This positive approach moves away from a developmental deficit lens towards a more child-centered, strengths-based understanding, which highlights children and youths' competencies (Renshaw et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2002). Positive psychology focuses on the enhanced functioning, competence and mental wellness of children (Roberts et al., 2002) and promotes early intervention (Bandura, 2008; Roberts et al., 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) peer mentoring program offers students the opportunity to explore their strengths in a structured and supportive group environment. Games, activities and conversations follow themes of communication, teamwork, communication, respecting self and others, problem-solving and self-reflection, all of which closely align with Seligman's (2011) positive psychology elements of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments (Seligman, 2002, 2011). In the Wiz Kidz program, the facilitator closely monitors one-to-one mentoring conversations and assists in reframing ways of thinking and perspective-taking to encourage a more open and inquisitive outlook in mentors and mentees. The Wiz Kidz program operates in schools with students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and mentors who have experienced adversity are provided a safe space to build

resiliency through the provision of close relationships with supportive adults and connections to prosocial peers within effective and responsive schools (Masten & Reed, 2002).

The Wiz Kidz program is designed to help shape participants' self-efficacy by focusing on success through mastery. Children who are self-efficacious feel they can improve their lives through social efforts and that personal investment in a desired future is meaningful and worthwhile (Bandura, 2008). Self-efficacy is promoted in the Wiz Kidz program through whole-group games that require everyone's contribution to achieve a solution. These opportunities encourage group collaboration, respect and problem-solving. Through these activities, peer mentors demonstrate awareness of their behavioural modelling and recognize that younger mentees look to them for direction (Coyne-Foresi, 2015). Participants in the Wiz Kidz program engage in future-oriented tasks such as thinking about goals and making educational and professional plans. Program participants are encouraged to look forward in their lives with hope and promise and to be self-efficacious in their life direction. In some ways, positive psychology (Seligman, 2011; Watkins, 2016) can be conceptualized as encouraging a relationship with the self in the present, while building skills, making plans and looking optimistically into the future.

To maintain consistency with the program's theoretical underpinnings, we framed this exploratory study on youth mentors' experiences using a positive psychology lens. Consistent with other positive psychology literature, the current framework moves away from the traditional deficit-lens and highlights a strengths-based perspective of youth competencies (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2014; Roberts, Brown, Johnson, & Reinke, 2002). Specifically, we focused on the long-term benefits that mentors derive from mentoring experiences in elementary school.

4.3 Current Study

This exploratory study provides a unique investigation into former youth mentors' experiences and lessons learned in the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) program. We posed the following research question: What skills or lessons did former youth mentors learn in the Wiz Kidz program and bring with them into their futures? Examined through a positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) lens, we examined the influence of participation in future-oriented, strengths-based and skill-building programming within a supportive group environment. We used group concept mapping to capture and highlight the youth mentors' individual ideas and subsequent interpretation of the group's collective thoughts.

Group concept mapping follows a six-step model (Kane & Trochim, 2007). First, the researchers determine a focus for the study and identify stakeholder participants. Second, the researchers conduct individual interviews or group brainstorming sessions to gather stakeholders' thoughts and ideas. Third, the researchers extract non-redundant statements from the interviews or group sessions and return them to the stakeholders to be sorted, categorized and rated by importance. Fourth, the researchers enter the data into the Concept System Global MAX (Concept Systems Incorporated, 2017) software for multidimensional scaling and subsequent cluster analysis. Fifth, the researchers interpret the resultant maps, considering the conceptual themes of the clusters and statistical fit. Finally, the researchers utilize the data to inform planning for future programming or evaluative purposes (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

Group concept mapping is a valuable tool for understanding children and youth's experiences (Dare & Nowicki, 2019). For example, Ewan, McLinden, Biro, DeJonckheere, and Vaughn (2016) used group concept mapping to identify adolescent health concerns. Similarly, Nowicki, Brown, and Stepien (2014) used group concept mapping to investigate social exclusion

among elementary school-aged students and supported children's abilities to meaningfully understand their experiences and participate in the group concept mapping process. A group concept mapping approach was ideal for our study because it respects youth mentors as stakeholders in the program and considers their ideas to be vital in future program planning.

4.3.1 Method

4.3.1.1 Participants. Five Wiz Kidz programs involving 95 student mentors (n = 48) and mentees (n = 47) were facilitated between 2013 and 2017. The program was facilitated at two urban elementary schools in Ontario, Canada. Three mentor cohorts (n = 28) that participated through the full 34-week program duration were invited to participate in the current study. Two cohorts were not included in this study; one cohort ended early due to low participant attendance and another cohort started late following the death of a school staff member. Eleven former mentors participated in the current study, including eight females and three males. Participants provided data two to four years after their involvement as Wiz Kidz program mentors. At the time of the study, participants were in grades 10 and 11, and attended one of eight high schools in Ontario. Study participants ranged from 15 to 17 years and averaged 15.9 years of age (SD = 0.83). Three participants had been Wiz Kidz mentors over two consecutive school years.

4.3.1.2 Materials. In the first phase of the study, we interviewed former youth mentors about their experiences in the Wiz Kidz program. We asked participants how being a mentor helped them in their own life. Specifically, we asked, "When you think about what happened for you in the Wiz Kidz program, how has being a mentor helped you in your own life?" We used the following prompt to elicit more information when appropriate: "Can you tell me more about that?" In this paper, we report responses that focused on skills and lessons learned by former mentors in the Wiz Kidz program.

During phase two of this study, we gave participants an envelope containing a set of 56 statements that we had selected and extracted from the interviews. Statements were printed on cards, with one statement on each card. Participants sorted the statements into piles in any way that made sense to them and provided a descriptive label for each pile's theme. We clarified that each statement could not be put into its own pile nor could all statements be put into one pile. We also gave participants a list of all of the extracted statements from the focal question and asked participants to rate their perceived importance of each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where a value of 1 = "not important," 2 = "somewhat important," 3 = "moderately important," 4 = very important," and 5 = "extremely important."

4.3.1.3 Procedure. We received approval for this study from our institutional ethics review board and the former youth mentors' school boards. To recruit participants, the first author, also the Wiz Kidz program facilitator, gave a list of former mentors (n = 28) to the school boards' research departments. The school board research departments determined which schools the students attended and forwarded the Recruitment Letter, Letter of Information and Parent Consent Form, and Assent Form to each school's principal for distribution to potential participants. Youth were invited to contact the first author by email or text if they were interested in participating. Initially, twelve former youth mentors communicated their interest in the study; however, one student later declined to participate. We obtained parental consent for all participants (n = 11), as all were under 18 years of age.

4.3.1.3.1 The interview phase. We conducted individual interviews at a time and place that was convenient to the participants. Three interviews were conducted over the lunch hour at the students' school, with the remainder (*n* = 8) conducted over the phone during evening hours. The eight students cited busyness as their rationale for requesting a phone interview. Interviews

averaged 7 minutes and 43 seconds (*SD* = 2.9 minutes). Each interview participant received a $10 gift certificate following their interview. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded.

4.3.1.3.2 Data preparation. The audio-recorded interviews were processed to text via Trint (Version 3.1.19, 2017), a cloud-based transcription program, and were reviewed for accuracy. Interview transcripts were entered into Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus, 2016) where each statement constituted an idea and was placed in its own cell. All of the statements that answered the focal question for this study (*n* = 66) were extracted and arranged into a list. The statements were extracted verbatim, or as close to verbatim as possible, from the interviews (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

To prepare the list of statements for sorting, the first and second authors independently reviewed the statements for clarity and redundancy. Among the extracted statements, we independently agreed upon fifty-two unique statements. Of the 14 statements not agreed upon, we resolved discrepancies through a second review and discussion. This process resulted in 56 unique interview statements (see Table 4-1).

*4.3.1.3.3 The sorting and rating phase***.** All interviewees from the first phase participated in the second phase sorting and rating activities. In the sorting and rating phase, participants arranged the list of unique statements into meaningful groups. Participants worked independently, with up to three people in a room at a time, to complete the sorting and rating task for this paper's focal question. Participants worked at their own table and could not see each other's work. The sorting and rating task for this paper's focal question took between 15 to 35 minutes (*M* = 22.7 minutes, *SD* = 6.1 minutes). Former youth mentors completed a sorting

Table 4-1 Statements for Each Cluster, Importance Ratings, and Statement Bridging Indices

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
Cluster 1: Improved Communication Skills		**3.83**	**0.20**
34	You have to learn to encourage the mentees to use their strengths and improve on their weaknesses, and that in turn influences them to be more positive, and it helps them in any area of life.	4.45	0.41
49	The main thing that I learned is that everybody, even how happy some of the kids may have looked, that they were having serious problems in their life.	4.18	0.17
3	I've learned how to be a better listener.	4.09	0.09
42	I learned that some things are difficult but you just need to find a way to get through it.	4.00	0.22
10	You learn to pick up on different people's signals and notice if they're acting different when most people would brush it off.	4.00	0.25
32	I've learned to show interest in something that someone else is passionate about, even if it is something that I wasn't entirely interested in.	3.91	0.22
31	I've learned to step out of my comfort zone to help other people feel comfortable.	3.91	0.26
8	I learned friendship skills.	3.73	0.06
41	The skills I learned in the program helped me be more open, even in my job now.	3.64	0.14
9	I learned how to talk to the mentees, ask questions, and get them to tell you if something's bugging them.	3.64	0.19
56	The skills I learned helped towards getting my job.	3.55	0.07
37	The program helped me talk in front of others.	3.36	0.11
18	I try to learn what other people are going through.	3.36	0.43
Cluster 2: Developed Interpersonal Skills		**3.64**	**0.18**
21	Being a mentor has helped me remember to keep an open mind.	4.18	0.00
27	I've grown to understand that there's no one right opinion.	4.18	0.03
2	The program helped me be more responsible.	4.18	0.04
35	I learned to teach other children about being in groups and being leaders of their own life.	4.18	0.12
28	I've become a more calm person, and learned to tolerate negative behaviour and not reciprocate.	4.09	0.02

Table 4-1 (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
4	The program encouraged us to treat others as we would want to be treated, and to be kind.	4.09	0.37
33	Showing interest in someone is a very positive influence you can have on their lives.	4.00	0.11
1	The program has helped me be a leader.	4.00	0.12
26	I've realized my flaws and what needed to be changed to create solid relationships with others and the people I was working with.	4.00	0.18
36	It helped me be more social.	3.91	0.03
54	The program helped with the beginnings of how to become an independent person.	3.82	0.08
6	I've learned how to reach out to people.	3.82	0.21
24	If I didn't have this experience I think I'd be a little bit more irrational about things and not take others into consideration.	3.82	0.24
55	Now when I see a problem, I decide if I'll get dragged into it or not and I get help out of those scenarios.	3.73	0.25
16	I am better with my younger family members now because I have learned how to tolerate kids.	3.64	0.13
12	I learned to take the lead in the program by asking questions, leading the activities, and suggesting things.	3.64	0.25
25	The program has helped me grow as a person.	3.55	0.01
53	The program helped me get my life on track.	3.55	0.11
23	The program has helped me broaden my perspective on other people and how I approach situations.	3.45	0.04
52	The program has helped me become a better teenager.	3.45	0.11
17	The program has helped me learn to give people chances.	3.36	0.06
20	The program gives you a whole new perspective on younger children.	3.36	0.23
5	The program was a great opportunity.	3.36	0.49
13	I find I take the lead in class if we have to do a group activity, I'm the one making the first move.	3.00	0.08
29	Being a mentor has helped me make friends easier.	3.00	0.43
19	A lot of kids in the higher grades think kids are annoying, but you'd be surprised, they could be smarter than you and can shock you for what they can do.	3.00	0.57
30	I've played a leadership role in a youth leadership camp since the program.	2.91	0.31
11	I've learned to compromise in my friendships.	2.91	0.56

Table 4-1 (Continued)

	Statement	Importance Rating (*M*)	Bridging Value
Cluster 3: Enhanced Trust-building Experience		**3.51**	**0.37**
51	I would give the mentees advice on how they how they could go back to their friends if they had an argument and work things out.	4.00	0.39
43	Some of the mentees we dealt with were really shy, and you just really had to find your way them.	3.82	0.37
39	Participating in the program made me feel like I was really helping someone have fun and be themselves.	3.82	0.37
47	I would help the mentees problem solve.	3.73	0.35
50	The mentees came to me talking about how they handle things, with some of them it's more violent and not really the best home life.	3.72	0.30
44	By having a conversation with your mentee, you build up trust.	3.55	0.37
40	I kind of felt like a big brother/sister hanging out with my mentee.	3.36	0.43
7	When we reached out to our mentees, we as the older kids were the ones who did a lot of the work.	3.00	0.40
22	I've never been one to be too strict with my mentee, but sometimes you need to be.	2.55	0.32
4. Increased Interest in Volunteerism		**2.70**	**0.77**
48	I did my volunteer hours mentoring and helped the kids decide right from wrong.	3.36	0.56
15	Before the program, I didn't know how to help younger kids.	2.91	0.67
45	I am a mentor to younger kids within my religious place of worship.	2.73	0.78
38	The program was the only group I participated in.	2.45	1.00
14	I would sign up to be both a mentee and mentor for the program if they had it in high school.	2.37	0.84
46	I help the adults at my religious place of worship.	2.36	0.77

Note. Bolded values indicate averages of the respective cluster's content.

and rating task for a second question that asked of relationships made through peer mentoring and is discussed elsewhere (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2020).

Seven mentors completed the sorting and rating activity during their lunch break. Three mentors who lived in the same neighbourhood, but attended different schools, met a member of the research team at a local coffee shop to complete the sorting and rating procedures. Due to distance, we mailed the sorting/rating package to one participant, and this participant sent the sorted and rated data to the researcher as a phone text image. Each sorting and rating activity participant received a $10 gift certificate as compensation.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Multidimensional scaling. We entered the sorted statements into Concept Systems Incorporated (Version 233.21, 2017) software, which is designed for group concept mapping. Using the software, we applied multidimensional scaling to the sorted data to create a two-dimensional data point map. This data point map showed the sorted statements along X-Y coordinates and displayed each statement's location and spatial relationship with the others. In multidimensional scaling, an index called Kruskal's stress value indicates how well the two-dimensional model fits the sorted data. This value ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents a perfect fit, and 1 represents a poor fit (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Nowicki & Brown, 2015). The stress value for our data point map was 0.2718, which is well below the maximum acceptable value of 0.365 for this application (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

4.4.2 Hierarchical cluster analysis. The next step in group concept mapping involves applying hierarchical cluster analysis to the data point map. This analysis examines the arithmetical distances among statements and provides a series of possible cluster models; boundary lines around the clusters differ between iterations but the points on the map do not

change (Nowicki & Brown, 2015). Based on proprietary algorithms, the Concept Systems (2017) software calculates a bridging value for each statement and cluster (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Bridging values range from 0 to 1; values near 0 indicate that participants often sorted statements with nearby statements on the map. Statements with low bridging values are good indicators of content in that area on the map (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Statements with values near 1 indicate that the statements have been sorted with statements further apart on the map (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Nowicki & Brown, 2015) and represent statements that "bridge" different concepts or may have been difficult to sort (Kane & Trochim, 2007).

The three authors independently reviewed a range of models between two and 10 clusters and determined that the four-cluster map provided the simplest model that retained distinct concepts with acceptable bridging values (see Figure 4-1). We determined cluster labels by examining the statements in the clusters and the labels suggested by the participants, as well as our own independent interpretations of the map (Kane & Trochim, 2007). While the cluster labels reflected the general theme of the statement contents, the clusters indicated some intra-cluster variability with respect to the relevance of statements within the overarching theme. In response to this study's focal question, "What skills or lessons did former youth mentors learn in the Wiz Kidz program and bring with them into their futures?" the concept map revealed the following four key concepts: (a) Improved Communication Skills (*M* bridging index = 0.20; 13 statements), (b) Developed Interpersonal Skills (*M* bridging index = 0.18; 28 statements), (c) Enhanced Trust-building Experience (*M* bridging index = 0.37; 9 statements), and (d) Increased Interest in Volunteerism (*M* bridging index = 0.77; 6 statements).

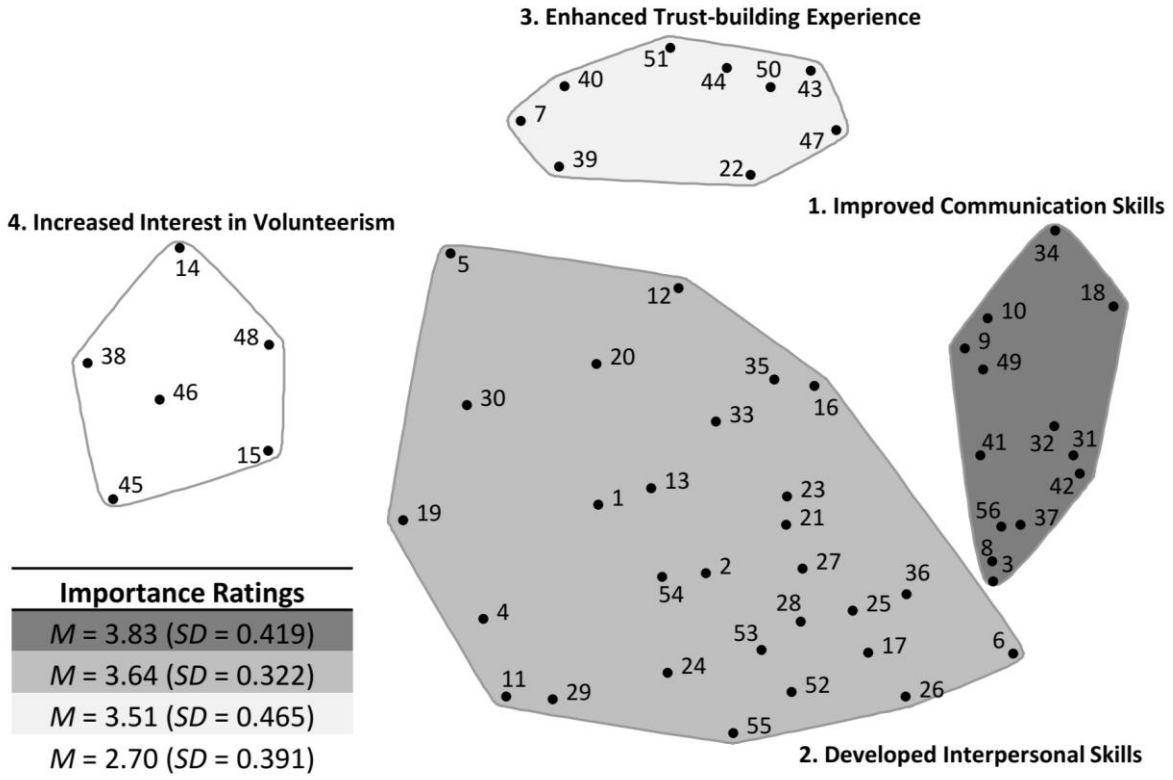

Figure 4-1: Concept map for the four-cluster solution showing spatial relationship between 56 generated statements.

Note. Statements are labeled by number (see Table 4-1 for a list of the statements and their reference numbers). Clusters are shaded dark to light per importance, where darker shading denotes higher mean importance rating.

4.4.3 Concept mapping summaries. Table 4-1 shows the list of 56 generated statements grouped by cluster. The table also shows the average importance rating and bridging index for each statement. Average bridging values for individual statements ranged between 0 and 1. Statements with the lowest bridging values (≤0.05) were all found within the same cluster. We calculated cluster mean ratings by averaging the importance ratings for statements contained in each cluster. Importance ratings for statements ranged from 2.36 to 4.45 (see Table 4-1). Fifteen of the 56 (26%) statements were rated as highly important (≥4.00) by participants. Statements with the highest mean ratings (≥4.00) were found in three of the four clusters. Average importance ratings for clusters ranged between 2.70 and 3.83. Below we describe each of the four clusters in the model, listed in order of importance.

4.4.3.1 Cluster 1: Improved communication skills. This cluster contained 13 statements and was sorted with a high degree of consistency (*M* bridging index = 0.20). Participants rated this cluster as most important overall (*M* = 3.83, *SD* = 0.42), with statement importance ratings ranging from 3.36 to 4.45. Statement 34 had the highest importance rating in the data set (4.45) and reflected the concept of mentors learning to identify their own personal character strengths: "You have to learn to encourage the mentees to use their strengths and improve on their weaknesses, and that in turn influences them to be more positive, and it helps them in any area of life." This cluster reflected ideas about perseverance (Statement 42, "I learned that some things are difficult but you just need to find a way to get through it") and support for others (Statement 31, "I've learned to step out of my comfort zone to help other people feel comfortable," and Statement 8, "I learned friendship skills"). Statement 32 indicated how others may think of or perceive things differently: "I've learned to show interest in something that someone else is passionate about, even if it is something that I wasn't entirely interested in." This cluster reflected

mentors' support of their mentees, as well as mentors' recognition of their mentees' social and emotional needs.

4.4.3.2 Cluster 2: Developed interpersonal skills. This cluster was the largest on the map, containing 28 statements. Average importance ratings ranged from 3.73 to 4.18, with an overall cluster importance rating of 3.64 (*SD* = 0.32). Participants sorted the statements in this cluster with the highest level of consistency (*M* bridging index = 0.18) compared to the other clusters. This cluster had seven statements with low bridging values (≤0.05) (Statements 2, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, and 36). It included core concepts of personal growth and perspective taking. For example, Statement 36, "It (the program) helped me be more social," and Statement 21, "Being a mentor has helped me remember to keep an open mind" (Statement 21). Mentors' specifically referred to the program contributions to their personal growth (Statements 25, 52, and 54; Statement 52, "The program has helped me become a better teenager") and perspective-taking (Statements 2, 19, 20, 23 and 24; Statement 19, "A lot of kids in the higher grades think kids are annoying, but you'd be surprised, they could be smarter than you and can shock you for what they can do").

In addition, this cluster had the highest concentration of highly important statement ratings (≥4.00) at nine statements (Statements 1, 2, 4, 21, 26, 27, 28, 33, and 35), including "The program helped me be more responsible" (Statement 2), and "I've become a more calm person, and learned to tolerate negative behaviour and not reciprocate" (Statement 32). Overall, this cluster reflected themes of personal growth, including self-reflection, perspective-taking, responsibility and leadership.

4.4.3.3 Cluster 3: Enhanced trust-building experience. This cluster had an average importance rating of 3.51 (*SD* = 0.47) and contained nine statements ranging in importance from 2.55 to 4.00. Participants sorted the statements in this cluster with moderately-high consistency

(*M* bridging index = 0.37). This cluster reflected relational connections between mentors and mentees as well as the trust mentees had in their mentors. Statements in this cluster included: "I kind of felt like a big brother/sister hanging out with my mentee" (Statement 40), and "By having a conversation with your mentee, you build up trust" (Statement 44). Many statements in this cluster reflected mentors' self-efficacy in assisting their mentees in problem solving and providing general advice (Statements 7, 39, 47, 50, and 51); for example, Statement 39, "Participating in the program made me feel like I was really helping someone have fun and be themselves," and Statement 51, "I would give the mentees advice on how they how they could go back to their friends if they had an argument and work things out"). This cluster reflected mentors' relationships with mentees, including building trust and providing guidance. Statements in this cluster suggest that mentors recognized the supportive social roles they provided to their mentees.

4.4.3.4 Cluster 4: Increased interest in volunteerism. Containing six statements, this cluster was the smallest on the cluster map and had a relatively high bridging index (*M* bridging index = 0.77) indicating that the contents of this cluster bridge other concepts in the map. The cluster contained statements ranging in average importance from 2.36 to 3.36 and had a mean cluster importance rating of 2.70 *(SD* = 0.39). Statements in this cluster reflected how learned skills could be transferred into future use. Many statements in this cluster revealed additional volunteering activities mentors participated in beyond the Wiz Kidz program (Statements 45, 46, and 48; Statement 48, "I did my volunteer hours mentoring and helped the kids decide right from wrong.")

Loosely-related statements of youth's prior inexperience with children (Statement 15, "Before the program, I didn't know how to help younger kids") and a desire to participate in

similar programming at the high school level (Statement 14, "I would sign up to be both a mentee and mentor for the program if they had it in high school") were also captured in this cluster. Statements in this cluster primarily focused on mentor skill-building and applicability of learned skilled for future volunteer and employment experiences.

4.5 Discussion

Youth mentors are stakeholders in the peer mentoring process and their experiences can inform program success and challenges and guide future programming. We examined the data through a positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) lens that supports the provision of strengths-identifying and skill-building programming within schools. Our group concept mapping approach provided a platform for former youth mentors to interpret and make meaning of the data they provided on the skills and lessons they learned in the program.

Mentors' personal growth and perspective taking was a key theme. The low bridging values contained in Cluster 2 highlighted mentors' agreement in their interpersonal development that centered on improved social awareness including their responsibility in keeping an open mind and respecting others' opinions. Participants became cognizant of how they conversed with and relayed information to their mentees. In addition, participants reported their awareness of others' life situations and personal concerns (Bandura, 2008). Participants discussed their awareness of their social roles as mentors (Karcher, 2008; Rhodes, 2002) including supporting their mentees in identifying character strengths and encouraging a positive outlook (Masten & Reed, 2002; Roberts et al., 2002; Seligman, 1991). Mentors reflected on the importance of their leadership skill and highlighted the importance of supporting mentees to be leaders. Former youth mentors reported the necessity of taking initiative in conversations and activities with mentees, as well as being attentive and responsive to the social needs of younger peers.

Participants' perceptions of themselves as sources of support for their mentees, including their use of assertiveness, are tethered to the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2008). Further, mentors recognized that their actions, including offers of advice and assistance with problem solving, could influence the choices of their younger mentees. This evidence of leadership capacity in youth mentors is consistent with the skill-building and strengths-identifying concepts of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). With regard to future-oriented skill-transfer, former youth mentors discussed their Wiz Kidz program participation as playing a role in securing later part-time employment and volunteer opportunities. Mentors mentioned general skill acquisition, including taking an alternative perspective, recognizing others' needs and maintaining an open mind when working with other people.

Taken together, the four clusters represented a range of themes. Through the sorting and rating activities, participants in this study became aware of how their peers had responded to the same question of the skills and lessons learned through mentoring. The statements provided by their peers may have presented new ideas to consider when reflecting on their mentoring experience. Former youth mentors identified interpersonal growth as a key experience in mentoring their younger peers. These outcomes were consistent with the Wiz Kidz program's positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) goals to identify and build on mentors' character strengths, further their communication and relational abilities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Watkins, 2016), and explore a relationship with themselves as growing individuals. The former mentors reflected on the influence their mentoring relationships had on their younger peers and discussed the leadership opportunities they experienced through the program. Peer mentoring programs rooted in a structured, strengths-identifying and future-oriented curricula can provide youth mentors with skill development they might not experience through traditional

classroom learning experiences. This study supports the intra- and interpersonal development of older elementary school-aged students as mentors who support their younger peers within the same school. Further, the increased exposure shared by mentors and mentees as a result of attending the same school may be a beneficial alternative to use of older visiting mentors. Elementary school-aged youth can serve as high quality in-school mentors and can benefit from their roles.

4.6 Limitations

This research highlights the relational competencies of youth mentors; however, some limitations are noted. First, the small sample size, although sufficient for group concept mapping (Kane & Trochim, 2007), has limited statistical generalizability. This study investigated the experiences of mentors from one peer mentoring program; the data may look different if more students were included and/or other programs were investigated. Second, this study may have sampling bias. It is possible that the youth mentors who volunteered to participate in the study viewed the program more favourably than other mentors. For example, the three participants who served in a mentoring role over two consecutive years may have perceived the program more positively than mentors who did not participate in this study. In addition, parental consent can be a source of sampling bias, as only students with parents supportive of the research could participate. Third, the first author's dual role may have influenced the participants because the first author was also the Wiz Kidz program facilitator. However, we aimed to reduce coercion in recruitment by inviting potential participants to contact the first author only if they were interested in participating. Furthermore, although we encouraged participants to speak openly about their experiences in the Wiz Kidz program, it is possible they censored their responses in the presence of the first author.

4.7 Implications for Program Facilitators

School-based peer mentoring programs provide youth mentors with opportunities to socialize with their same-age peers while working with younger mentees (Karcher, 2009). Participants in this study believed the Wiz Kidz program provided opportunities to interact with and learn from younger students. When implementing school-based mentoring programs, we encourage program facilitators to consider the benefits that both mentors and mentees can experience. This study also suggests that elementary school-age children can benefit from mentoring opportunities within a structured school-based program.

When recruiting potential mentors, program facilitators can keep in mind the benefits that mentors revealed through this study, including improved communication, interpersonal and trust-building skills. Moreover, these benefits were expressed two to four years following program completion. The findings from this study suggest that structured youth mentoring opportunities in elementary school, such as those provided through the Wiz Kidz program, can offer long term benefits to mentors. Mentors gained leadership experience outside of the classroom and appreciated the influence their mentoring relationships had on their younger peers. The skills and lessons uncovered through this study emphasized former youth mentors' perceptions of their self-efficacy, as well as their awareness of how their leadership roles might influence their younger peers. In addition, former youth mentors believed their mentoring experiences contributed to achieving their future goals.

4.8 Lessons Learned for Evaluators

Group concept mapping is an ideal approach for exploratory studies (Cousineau, Franko, Ciccazzo, Goldstein, & Rosenthal, 2006) and is a method that highlights the views and experiences of youth as stakeholders in mentoring their younger peers. Group concept mapping

was especially useful in this study because youth mentors read through their peers' responses and reflected on a diverse range of mentoring experiences that they may not otherwise have experienced.

Although 28 former mentors who were invited to participate in this study, only 11 agreed to take part. While we were pleased with this response rate, our approach to future long-term evaluation may be different. Specifically, to aid in recruitment, evaluators may seek mentors' consent to use their contact information for longitudinal inquiry to avoid difficulties in locating former mentors years on.

Finally, this study provides evidence that high school students can give valuable feedback on their involvement in elementary school programs. It contributes to research that reveals the capacities, capabilities and interpersonal benefits of youth mentors who have historically been overlooked as supportive figures to their younger peers (Herrera et al., 2008, Karcher, 2005, 2009).

4.9 Opportunities for Future Research

Future research could investigate how mentorship influences youths' awareness of the life-circumstances of their peers. More generally, we encourage research on the experiences of youth mentors to gather a better understanding of their experiences, as well as the associated abilities and challenges that accompany the mentoring role. Assessing measures such as grades, graduation rates and post-secondary pathways, may shed light on the role program participation may have on improving student engagement at school. Future studies may benefit from collecting data from mentors both immediately following the program end and longitudinally. Further study of elementary school-aged mentors is encouraged to better understand the benefits and limitations of utilizing such a young cohort to support their younger peers.

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5. Chapter Five: Final Considerations

The following final considerations aim to tie together findings from the three studies, provide overall reflections, and propose future research directions. The studies in this dissertation provide insights into the reflections of youths' peer mentoring experiences at 15 to 17 years of age who served as mentors when they were between 12 and 14 years of age. This dissertation comprised of three investigations: (a) the relationships and connections former youth mentors experienced mentoring their younger peers (Chapter Two), (b) educators' interpretations of youths' thoughts on relational outcomes of mentoring (Chapter Three), and (c) the skills and lessons former youth mentors took into their futures from their mentoring experiences (Chapter Four). Mentors' reflections of the relationships and connections made during their peer mentoring experience were viewed through an attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) lens and focused specifically on mentors' connections to their schools and relationships within the school (Pianta, 1992). Educators' interpretations of former youth mentors' relational experiences were sought as an additional program stakeholders' perspective to the youth mentors. Mentors' reflections of the skills and lessons learned from mentoring their younger peers were examined using a positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) lens and investigated the influence participating in future-oriented, strengths-based, and skill-building programming had on mentors' future endeavors. This research contributes to the literature on the youth mentor experience.

5.1 Overall Findings

The goal of this research was to explore former youth mentors' experiences mentoring their younger peers in the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) peer mentoring program. The extant literature reveals little about youth/child mentoring relationships in school settings (Karcher, 2014; Portwood & Ayers, 2005), especially at the elementary-school level. Previous research on

peer mentoring has typically focused on the outcomes for mentees (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014) or investigated the experiences of high school-aged youth matched with younger mentees (Herrera, Kauh, Cooney, Grossman, & McMaken, 2008; Karcher, 2005, 2009). Similar to the benefits experienced by mentees, Karcher's (2009) investigation of elementary school-aged youth serving as mentors to their younger peers reported larger gains in school-related connectedness and self-esteem compared to their same-age peers who did not participate in mentoring. Of biggest benefit, elementary school-aged youth mentors are more accessible to their younger peers because they attend school in the same building. Mentors who attend the same schools as their mentees can lend themselves as natural role models, positively influencing mentees' academic attitudes (Chan, Rhodes, Howard, Lowe, Schwartz, & Herrera, 2013), prosocial behaviors (Chan, et al., 2013; Coyne-Foresi, 2015) and school attendance (Coyne-Foresi, 2015; Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012; Herrera, 1999).

5.1.1 Chapter Two: The relationships and connections former youth mentors experienced from mentoring their younger peers. In the current study, Chapter Two explored youth mentors' reflections of the relationships and connections made with peers and staff at school through participation in a peer mentoring program. As part of group concept mapping methodology, 11 former youth mentors responded to the interview focal question, *When you think about what happened for you in the Wiz Kidz program, how would you describe the relationships and connections you made at school, at home, or in the community, or elsewhere?* Participants sorted and rated 77 statements generated from their collective interview data. Youth conceptualized their reflections of the relationships and connections made mentoring their younger peers into three themes: (a) Communication Skills, (b) Relationships with Mentees, and

(c) Connections with School and Staff. Statement ratings averaged moderate importance; individual statement ratings ranged between not important and very important.

Mentors' experiences of connecting and relating with others at school was viewed through an attachment theory lens (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment theory informs that children's perceptions of safety and security is directly related to their emotional connections to their caregivers (Bowlby, 1988), and can extend beyond the home to include teachers and educators (Pianta, 1992). For example, students frequently cited school staff as natural mentors and sources of social support at school (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Luthar, 2006; Pianta, 1999; Portwood & Ayers 2005). Miranda-Chan, Fruiht, Dubon, and Wray-Lake's (2016) longitudinal study found children who were supported by non-parental mentors experienced later relationship satisfaction, educational attainment, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being in adulthood. Findings from the current study revealed former youth mentors' improved interpersonal relations with school staff and the program facilitator as a result of their participation. Mentors' improved relationships with school staff align with the peer mentoring program goal for program participants to view staff as a source of support and may be bolstered by the natural mentoring relationships staff have with students at school (Portwood & Ayers, 2005).

Of peers relating with each other, Groh and colleagues' (2014) meta-analytic review of peer relationships found secure early attachments with peers fostered continued competency in other peer relations and played a profound role in children's future peer competence. In the current study, mentors' awareness of their self-identification as role models to their younger peers was as a central theme and consistent with research on mentors' identity development through a helping role (Karcher, 2008; Rhodes, 2002). In turn, mentors in the current study reported the development of new relationships with program mentees and fellow mentors which

paralleled research on improved social competence learned through working with others (Groh et al., 2014). In addition, mentors reported improved communication skills and perspective-taking through their work with mentees. For example, the statement with the highest average importance rating in the data set identified the importance of listening: *Being in the program helped me listen to people better, listen to their opinions, and understand what they're trying to say* (Statement 21). The provision of social bonding opportunities to improve mentors' interpersonal skills can contribute to a positive school climate where students' experience a sense of belonging to the school and discourage bullying behaviours (Karcher, 2005; Smith, 2012). Similarly, mentors in the current study identified enhanced connection and belonging to their schools through their active engagement in social programming (Hagerty, Lynch Sauer, Patusky, & Bouwsema, 1993; Karcher, 2005; Pianta, 1992).

5.1.2 Chapter Three: Educators' interpretations of youths' thoughts on relational outcomes of mentoring. Pianta's (1992) research on children's attachment relationships with other adults, including teachers, is an extension of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988). Teachers and other educators, including school administration and support staff, are influential supports for children's growing social and emotional development (Pianta, 1992). Educators may provide security at school and serve as supplementary or additional supports for children who have experienced maltreatment, divorce, and trauma (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta, 1992; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Zajac & Kobak, 2006).

In the current study, educators with experience working with older elementary school students were sought as a more accessible alternative to facilitate school social programming than school counsellors who are not present in all schools. Fifteen elementary school educators, including teachers, school administrators and support staff, participated in a group concept

mapping sorting and rating procedure using data generated by youth that asked of youths' reflections of the connections and relationships made in the peer mentoring program. Results indicated educators sorted the data in a similar way to the youths' conceptualizations in Study 1 but compared to the three-cluster model generated by former youth mentors, educators conceptualized four clusters: (a) Skills Mentors Learned in the Peer Mentoring Program, (b) Mentors' Relationships with School and Staff, (c) Mentors' Experiences in the Peer Mentoring Program, and (d) Mentors' Relationships with Mentees. Clusters (a), (b) and (d) had a high degree of overlap with the three clusters (a) Communication Skills, (b) Relationships with Mentees, and (c) Connections with School generated by youth. Educators' selection of statements reflected themes of former youth mentors' perspective-taking, consideration for others, and appreciation of school staff experienced through peer mentoring program participation. The interpersonal skills youth mentors used to assist their younger peers within their schools are of importance to educators who seek strategies to build students' empathy and engagement (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016). Students' feelings of connection to school staff is enhanced with educators' use of emotional accessibility and responsiveness (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Hughes, 2012; Pianta, 1999). Cluster (c) in the current study, Mentors' Experiences in the Peer Mentoring Program, was the new cluster not included by youth. It is reflective of mentors' experiences engaging in program activities within a group context. Educators demonstrated more complex sorting strategies with use of more thematic categories (Jacobson & Wilensky, 2006). In addition, educators in the current study assigned overall higher importance ratings to the data compared to youths' ratings. Educators' life experience and maturity may have contributed to their higher statement ratings and may reflect their strong investment in fostering relationships

with their students to support students' academic and social success (Hughes, 2012; Murray, Kosty, & Hauser-McLean, 2016).

5.1.3 Chapter Four: The skills and lessons former youth mentors took into their futures from their mentoring experiences. Positive psychology theory (Seligman, 2011) utilizes a child-centered, strengths-based understanding to highlight children and youths' competencies (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2014; Roberts, Brown, Johnson, & Reinke, 2002). In the current study, Chapter Four utilized a positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) lens to examine former youth mentors' reflections of the skills and lessons learned through mentoring their younger peers. Following group concept mapping procedures, the same 11 former youth mentors discussed in Chapter Two responded to the interview focal question, *When you think about what happened for you in the Wiz Kidz program, how has being a mentor helped you in your own life?* Participants sorted and rated the 56 statements generated from their collective interview data. Overall ratings averaged moderate importance with individual statement importance ratings ranging from somewhat important to very important. Youth conceptualized their reflections of the skills and lessons learned from mentoring their younger peers into four themes: (a) Improved Communication Skills, (b) Developed Interpersonal Skills, (c) Enhanced Trust-building Experience, and (d) Increased Interest in Volunteerism.

In the current study, mentors' recognition of the influence they had on their younger mentees and trust mentees held in them as mentors was consistent with positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) research that highlights the social competencies of children and youth (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2014; Roberts, Brown, Johnson, & Reinke, 2002). The program of study (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) provided participants opportunities to practice collaborative and problem-solving skills with others while working towards shared goals in group activities and

games. Bandura (2008) noted that self-efficacy in children promotes social efforts to improve their lives, as well as a personal investment in a desired future that has meaning, accomplishment, and worth. Also aligning with positive psychology theory (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Watkins, 2016), mentors discussed their use of communication skills to encourage mentees' positive outlook and identification of their character strengths. For example, the highest rated statement in the data set was: *You have to learn to encourage the mentees to use their strengths and improve on their weaknesses, and that in turn influences them to be more positive, and it helps them in any area of life* (Statement 34). The peer mentoring program of study encouraged participants' resilience through personal adversity with the provision of close relationships with supportive adults and connections to prosocial peers within a safe environment (Masten & Reed, 2002). The program fosters participants' optimistic thinking patterns to reframe their familial and/or community struggles as contributors to their resilience.

Engaging students within structured programming outside of the classroom can provide both social and emotional support thereby building life skills. Program participants are encouraged to look forward in their lives with hope and promise and to be self-efficacious in their life direction. Moving forward in their lives, mentors reported utilizing the skills they learned through their mentoring experiences to attain part-time employment and volunteer opportunities following their participation in the peer mentoring program.

5.2 Reflections

Five principal themes were revealed though the current research that informs future peer mentoring program implementation: (a) peer mentors who have adverse histories and poor school reputations can benefit from serving as youth mentors, (b) peer mentoring programs can provide youth mentors with opportunities to engage with and learn from peers of different ages

and developmental stages, (c) educators who serve as facilitators of peer mentoring program can be considered as role models to program participants, (d) the skills youth mentors learn through mentoring their younger peers can translate into future use, and (e) the use of group concept mapping as a research method with youth is beneficial to preserve the student voice in communicating their mentoring experiences.

As evidenced in Chapter Two, youth assigned Statement 18, *School staff didn't expect me to be in the program,* the lowest average importance rating in the data set and communicated their beliefs in their abilities to mentor their younger peers without concern for what they perceived school staff to think of them. As such, Wiz Kidz peer mentor recruitment may be best accomplished through a volunteer-based approach rather than being based only on facilitators' selections. Research shows that students who enjoy school become more engaged in school-based initiatives that can further the development of improved friendships, social skills, and prosocial and academic success than peers who do not like school (Hallinan, 2008; Murray et al., 2016). However, when provided with the opportunity, it appears that mentors who perceived themselves as having poor reputations and challenging histories can find success in furthering their leadership skills through their mentoring roles. Theory supports the inclusion of students with difficult personal histories and reputations in peer mentoring roles in two ways. First, through an attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) and extended supportive educator (Pianta, 1992) lens, youth mentors are provided a safe and structured environment under the supportive guidance and role modelling of the program facilitator (Hallinan, 2008; Hughes, 2012; Murray et al., 2016). Further, mentors' increased exposure and improved relationships with the program facilitator can lend to mentors' views of the program facilitator as a source of social and emotional support in times of need (Hallinan, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Murray et al., 2016).

Second, viewed through a positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) lens, mentors with poor reputations and social histories may acquire improved interpersonal skills through school-based group programming (Karcher, 2008). In addition, mentors may experience improved self-confidence and intrapersonal growth through participation in strengths-identifying and goal-oriented activities as part of peer mentoring programming (Bandura, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Watkins, 2016). Program facilitators are encouraged to consider recruiting youth mentors that may serve to benefit from exposure to prosocial same-age peers within a structured and supportive group environment in addition to youth who volunteer for their mentoring roles.

School-based programming has typically been studied within a classroom context (Hughes, 2012); however, this program of research focused on a peer mentoring program that took place outside of the classroom. Mentors and mentees had an opportunity to socialize and engage with peers of different ages and developmental stages that they would have otherwise not have known. Students' engagement and learning from peers can be linked to both attachment (Bowlby, 1988) and positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) theory. Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth's (1989) work on attachment theory supports the need to belong as innate and responsible for shaping one's regular need for social contact to feel connected to others (Bandura, 1982). Applied to a school context, children's secure early attachments with peers fostered continued friendship skills and played a profound role in children's future peer competence (Groh et al., 2014). Youth in mentoring roles to younger peers may experience change in how they see themselves and internalize their role model statuses (Karcher, 2008; Rhodes, 2002). Viewed through a positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) lens, mentors may learn relational skills, such as perspective-taking, leadership, responsibility, and empathy, though their

interactions with mentees (Bandura, 2008; DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). In the current study, mentors' comments about their interactions with mentees were generally positive, including mentors' improved perspective-taking and confidence in communicating with younger children (e.g., *Participating in the program made me feel like I was really helping someone have fun and be themselves*, Chapter Four, Statement 39, and *I had to explain things in a different way so the mentees could understand*, Chapter Two, Statement 47). It was anticipated that mentors would assume a leadership role when engaging with mentees (e.g., *I learned to take the lead in the program by asking questions, leading the activities, and suggesting things*, Chapter Four, Statement 12); however, mentors' reflections emphasized their encouragement of mentees to embrace leadership roles as well (e.g., *I learned to teach other children about being in groups and being leaders of their own life*, Chapter Four, Statement 35).

This program of research highlights educators' recognition of themselves as supportive figures to the students in their classes and those within the broader school. Educators who seek opportunities to engage students outside of the classroom may provide additional avenues of social support to a targeted group of students who require it, and perhaps reach students whom educators did not know needed support. For example, mentors discussed their improved relationships with the program facilitator through increased exposure in the mentoring program, rather than not participating in the program at all (e.g., *I connected with the facilitator and got to know him/her better, otherwise I wouldn't have talked to him/her in the first place*, Chapter Two, Statement 34, and *The relationship between the facilitator and I changed a lot because after joining it opened the door to talk more about anything going on in my life*, Chapter Two, Statement 74). As rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), a relationship with at least one caring adult, not necessarily a parent, is one of the most important protective factors for youth

(Bandura, 2008; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Within a school context, educators' demonstration of emotional accessibility and warmth can encourage students' secure relationships and positive adjustment at school (Hughes, 2012; Pianta, 1999). Identifed by youth as natural mentors outside of the home, educators' positive influences on students can reach beyond study habits and curricula taught in the classroom (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005; Luthar, 2006; Portwood & Ayers, 2005). The provision of school-based social programming can expand educators' social influence as role models to students (Šejtanić & Lalić, 2016). Thus, educators are encouraged to seek social programming interventions to engage students outside of the classroom.

Mentors' reflections of improved relationships extended beyond their relationship with the facilitator to include other school staff (e.g., *My role as a mentor made me look more mature and involved in the school to school staff*, Chapter Two, Statement 26, and *The program gave me more respect for the school staff that deals with younger children*, Chapter Two, Statement 54). Furthermore, mentors discussed their continued involvement with their former elementary schools (e.g., *I return to my elementary school to assist with the school show*, Chapter Two, Statement 14); seeing their mentees after mentors graduated from their elementary schools (e.g., *When I return to my elementary school, my mentee remembers me and is so excited to see me*, Chapter Two, Statement 24); and seeing former mentees within the communities in which they live (e.g., *Some of the children that were in the program who live in my community constantly talk to me, asking me what to do or how to handle situations they're in*, Chapter Two, Statement 72). Youth mentors can acquire a host of relationships with others when provided school-based opportunities to work with and learn from others within a group context.

To summarize, this program of research took a follow-up approach to examine youth mentors' reflections of skills and lessons learning in a peer mentoring program two to four years

after participation. The extant literature of youth mentoring has generally investigated the immediate outcomes of program participation (Karcher, 2009; Willis, Bland, Manka, & Craft, 2012); the current study sought to understand the skill-transfer that occurs *after* youth mentors' program experiences. Mentors reflected on how their participation in the peer mentoring program contributed to their personal growth (e.g., *The program has helped me broaden my perspective on other people and how I approach situations*, Chapter Four, Statement 23), and appreciation for younger children (e.g., *A lot of kids in the higher grades think kids are annoying, but you'd be surprised, they could be smarter than you and can shock you for what they can do*, Chapter Four, Statement 19). Mentors discussed how their mentoring experiences contributed to their employment and later volunteer opportunities (e.g., *The skills I learned helped towards getting my job*, Chapter Four, Statement 56, and *I did my volunteer hours mentoring and helped the kids decide right from wrong*, Chapter Four, Statement 48). The aforementioned concepts of former youth mentors' inter- and intrapersonal growth align with positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) theory concepts of building on strengths to further the abilities of youth (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Watkins, 2016). Peer mentoring programs can provide opportunities for both mentors and mentees to identify their character strengths and consider ways to emphasize these skills moving forward in their lives.

Finally, as a youth-friendly participatory research method (Nowicki, Brown & Dare, 2017), group concept mapping methodology (Kane & Trochim, 2007) was used throughout this program of research to gather both youths' and educators' interpretations of the data generated by former youth mentors. Group concept mapping provided a platform for the collective reflections of former youth mentors' experiences in a peer mentoring program. When mentors were presented with the unique responses to the focus question, they became aware of how their

peers had responded. The statements provided by mentors may have resonated with their peers, and perhaps could have provided new concepts to consider when reflecting on the relationships and skills attained through mentoring. When examining programming targeted to children and youth, it is necessary to gather the perspectives of all program stakeholders (Hughes, 2012; Poulou, 2015), including program facilitators. Thus, it was important that educators' evaluations of the youths' reflections of the relational data be analyzed in a consistent manner through use of group concept mapping. While both youth and educators conceptualized the statements provided by youth in a similar way, educators assigned an overall higher importance rating to the statements compared to the youths' importance ratings. Educators' life experience and maturity may support their recognition of their roles beyond delivering academic curricula in the classroom. Educators also serve as role models who contribute to their students' growth into productive and prosocial citizens. Educators are strongly invested in fostering relationships with their students to support students' learning and wellbeing (Hughes, 2012; Murray et al., 2016).

5.3 Limitations

Some limitations to this study are noted. The study had a small sample size. Although sufficient for the group concept mapping methodology (Kane & Trochim, 2007), its small sample size lends to limited generalizability. Although purposeful sampling was used to acquire the educator sample, and is commonly used in qualitative research, it may result in low levels of reliability and generalizability to other populations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). There may also be sampling bias. It is possible that the youth mentors who participated in this study viewed the program more favourably than other mentors and perhaps were more motived to share their reflections having had a positive experience. In addition, the

requirement of parental consent can be a source of sampling bias because only students with parents supportive of the research could participate.

The researcher's dual role as Wiz Kidz program facilitator may have influenced the former youth mentors' choice to participate in the study. However, potential participants' invitation to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating was used to limit recruitment coercion. Conversely, it is possible that former youth mentors chose not to participate in the study knowing the researcher's dual role. Additionally, while mentors were encouraged to speak openly about their experiences in the program, it is possible they censored their responses in the presence of the researcher.

5.4 Future Directions

This program of research reveals many questions for future study. Assessing measures such as school attendance, grades, and graduation rates may shed light on the role peer mentoring may have on improving student engagement at school. Future studies may benefit from collecting data from mentors both immediately following the program and longitudinally to reveal trends in former youth mentors' intra- and interpersonal development as they mature. In addition, longitudinal research may investigate which career paths those with mentoring experience follow or if former youth mentors participate in other mentoring roles later.

Researchers are encouraged to gather a better understanding of students' experiences mentoring their younger peers, as well as the mentors' successes and challenges that accompany the role. For example, mentors discussed feelings of frustration with trying to engage their mentees in program activities and setting boundaries (e.g. *Sometimes my mentee didn't want to come to the program and sometimes refused to talk to me which was difficult*, Chapter Two, Statement 59, and *I've never been one to be too strict with my mentee, but sometimes you need to*

be, Chapter Four, Statement 22). Future research may investigate the influence mentors' frustrations with their mentees have on youth mentors' program engagement and attendance. In the current program of research, mentors discussed perceptions of the challenges mentees faced at home and within their communities (e.g., *I felt like my mentee's parents weren't really there for him/her, he/she just wanted me to be there for him/her*, Chapter Two, Statement 33, and *The mentees came to me talking about how they handle things, with some of them it's more violent and not really the best home life*, Chapter Four, Statement 50). Further study is encouraged to understand the emotional and social limits of youth mentors' well-being when triaging more serious issues mentees disclose. While the efficacy of peer mentoring programs is enhanced with adequate supervision, among other best practices including mentor training and structured activities (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), future research is required to assess the maturity of youth mentors who give social support to their younger mentees.

Murray, Kosty, and Hauser-McLean's (2016) investigation of educators serving as school-based program facilitators suggested that research is needed to better understand students' relationships with their facilitators within the programming context. The current study demonstrated students may feel inclined to seek social or emotional support from their program facilitators as a result of regular interpersonal contact within the program. More research into the reasons for seeking support and the likelihood of approaching staff for social or emotional guidance requires further investigation. School-based mentoring programs are often underrepresented in research because educators who facilitate such programming at school are not affiliated with community mentoring agencies, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters (2020), that collect data on mentoring activities (Karcher, 2014). Future research may provide program facilitators with a database outlet to report information associated with the programs they run

(Karcher, 2014). Within a group concept mapping framework, statements generated by elementary school-aged mentors may be interpreted by high school-aged and adult mentors to observe how mentors of different ages and life stages assign importance the youth mentoring experience. Additionally, future research may shed light on the reasons for lower importance ratings of statements for youth mentors compared to adult facilitators.

5.5 Last Words

The development of the Wiz Kidz (Coyne-Foresi, 2015) peer mentoring program began as an idea to support one youth mentor and grew into a program that engaged almost one hundred students. The Wiz Kidz program has been investigated for its influence on school connectedness for both mentors and mentees and its programming influence on its mentors. School-based peer mentoring programs provide students with a unique opportunity to work with peers of differing ages and developmental trajectories of whom they would otherwise not have exposure to. Engaging youth in mentoring roles within their schools can support their intra- and interpersonal development when they learn from their mentees within a structured and supervised environment. Elementary school-aged youth mentors can serve as effective and influential role models to their younger peers and provide an advantage of being in the same school building as opposed to older mentors who may visit from the community or local high schools. While prosocial youth may be perceived to easily fit the roles of peer mentors, program facilitators are encouraged to include mentors with a developing social skillset who may benefit from building their leadership experiences. It is a hope that educators recognize the importance of their own social roles beyond the classroom. Educators can foster relationships and connections with students through the provision of school-based social programming. Further,

educators may never know the value their own mentorship means to their students' social and emotional wellbeing.

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Appendix A: Description of Five Wiz Kidz Peer Mentoring Program Participant Cohorts

Wave 1. The 2013-2014 Wiz Kidz participants included twelve grades seven and eight students matched with twelve grades two and three mentees. As a pilot project, the school support counsellor received a provincial grant that funded the purchase of toys and activities for the program, including brain-games, interactive games, equipment to encourage physical activity, and art supplies for quieter play. The toys and activities are used regularly in all subsequent Wiz Kidz programming. The money also funded a Wiz Kidz parent night where each participant and one parent were invited for dinner, further explanation of the program and its goals, and 45 minutes of play in the gymnasium demonstrating to parents what a typical program session looked like. Mid-year bake sale funds purchased a park bench etched, "Wiz Kidz Buddy Bench," built by the local high school, and installed on the schoolyard for students to sit and be identified by their peers as needing a friend and welcomed in play. At program termination, certificates were awarded to each participant, determined by group nominations, identifying a strength or talent that was exhibited throughout the program, such as "Most Caring Wiz Kid," "Funniest Wiz Kid," and "Most Playful Wiz Kid." Four mentors from the Wave 1 cohort participated in the study.

Wave 2. The second cohort included eight grades seven and eight mentors and eight grades two and three mentees, and ran from September 2014 through December 2014. The program terminated early due to dwindling mentor attendance. After further inquiry, it was discovered that the mentors joined the program in hopes of earning additional school involvement points for their graduation ceremony. It was believed that the student mentors may not have been interested in the concept of mentoring as the other mentor cohorts.

Wave 3. The program also ran during the 2014-2015 school year at a second school under the name Paw Pals, a name reflective of the school mascot. Eight grades seven and eight mentors and eight grades two and three mentees participated in the program from September through May. Five mentors from Wave 3 cohort participated in the study.

Wave 4. The 2015-2016 Paw Pals program ran from September through May with twelve grade eight mentors and twelve grades two and three mentees. This was the second year of mentoring for three youth, as they had participated as youth mentors the previous year (2014-2015) when in grade seven. Five mentors participated from the Wave 4 cohort; two of these mentors were new to the program and three has previously participated in the Wave 3 cohort.

Wave 5. The start-up of the 2016-2017 Paw Pals program was delayed due to the death of the school's vice-principal in fall and ran from January through May 2017. As no grades seven and eight students were interested in participating as mentors, a group of nine grade six mentor volunteers who demonstrated prosocial qualities were chosen and matched with nine grades one, two, and three mentees. In this cohort, the mentee group was extended to include grade one students identified by school staff as having emerging social needs. With the surplus funds from the school's three previous mid-year bake sales, a large engraved memorial stone was purchased and placed in the school yard in recognition of the school's late vice principal.

Appendix B: Western University Ethics Approval: Initial Application

Western Research

Date: 15 December 2017

To: Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

Project ID: 110053

Study Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Full Board

Meeting Date: 13/Oct/2017

Date Approval Issued: 15/Dec/2017

REB Approval Expiry Date: 15/Dec/2018

Dear Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
REB - Appendix A Interview Guide Ver1 Sept 1	Interview Guide	01/Sep/2017	1
REB - Appendix B Recruitment Letter Ver2 Nov 29 - clean	Tracked Changes Document	29/Nov/2017	2
REB - Appendix C Information Letter for Principals Ver2 Nov29 - clean	Tracked Changes Document	29/Nov/2017	2
REB - Appendix D Letter of Information Parents Ver3 Nov29 - clean	Written Consent/Assent	29/Nov/2017	3
REB - Appendix E Letter of Information 18+ Participant Ver3 Nov29 - clean	Written Consent/Assent	29/Nov/2017	3
REB - Appendix F Assent Letter Ver3 Nov29 - clean	Written Consent/Assent	29/Nov/2017	3
REB - Appendix G Debrief Ver1 Sept 1	Debriefing document	01/Sep/2017	1

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[redacted], NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Appendix C: Western University Ethics Approval: Amendment to include 2014-2016 Peer Mentoring Program Cohorts

Western Research

Date: 9 April 2018

To: Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

Project ID: 110053

Study Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Application Type: NMREB Amendment Form

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: May 4th 2018

Date Approval Issued: 29/Mar/2018

REB Approval Expiry Date: 15/Dec/2018

Dear Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
REB Amendment - Appendix A Interview Guide Ver2 Mar9 - clean	Interview Guide	09/Mar/2018	2
REB Amendment - Appendix B Recruitment Letter Ver3 Mar9 - clean	Recruitment Materials	09/Mar/2018	3
REB Amendment - Appendix E Letter of Information 18+ Participant Ver4 Mar9 - clean	Written Consent/Assent	09/Mar/2018	4
REB Amendment - Appendix F Assent Letter Ver4 Mar9 - clean	Written Consent/Assent	09/Mar/2018	4
REB Amendment - protocol Mar9 - clean	Protocol	09/Mar/2018	1
REB Amendment- Appendix D Letter of Information Parents Ver4 Mar9 - clean	Written Consent/Assent	09/Mar/2018	4

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
REB Amendment - Appendix C Information Letter for Principals Ver3 Mar9 - clean	Other Materials	09/Mar/2018	3

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[redacted] NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Appendix D: Western University Ethics Approval: Amendment to include Educator Participants

Western Research

Date: 8 March 2019

To: Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

Project ID: 110053

Study Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Application Type: NMREB Amendment Form

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: April 5 2019

Date Approval Issued: 08/Mar/2019

REB Approval Expiry Date: 15/Dec/2019

Dear Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
REB - Appendix J Recruitment Letter Ver1 Feb 15	Written Consent/Assent	15/Feb/2019	1
REB - Appendix K Letter of Information 18+ Participant Ver1 Feb 15 clean	Written Consent/Assent	15/Feb/2019	1
REB Amendment - protocol Feb26 -clean	Protocol	26/Feb/2019	2

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[redacted], NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Page 1 of 1

Appendix E: Thames Valley District School Board Approval for Research

RESEARCH COMMITTEE
Notice of Approval

November 28, 2017

Dear Melissa Coyne-Foresi,

This notice confirms that the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) External Research Review Committee has approved your project. Your study has been assigned ***Project Number: 2017_010***. Please be sure to include your research project number when communicating with Committee members.

Please ensure that you have submitted valid Criminal Record Checks with vulnerable sector screening for everyone entering TVDSB sites and/or collecting data from students and/or employees prior to commencing your study. These should be submitted in hard copy to TVDSB, with attention to Research and Assessment Services. Please indicate whether or not you wish to retain your original documentation so that a photocopy can be obtained following the verification process.

Project Number: 2017_010
Title of Project: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers
Approved on: November 21, 2017
Expiry Date: June 30, 2018

Once your project is complete, please forward a copy of the results those participants who have requested this information, as well as to the External Research Review Committee.

If you have any further questions regarding this research approval, please email [redacted]

Sincerely,

External Research Review Committee
Thames Valley District School Board
[redacted]

Thames Valley District School Board — *We build each student's tomorrow, every day.*

Appendix F: Information Letter for Principals (2013-2014 Peer Mentoring Program Cohorts)

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Information Letter for Principals

Dear secondary school principal,

I have asked the TVDSB's Research and Assessment department to contact you. As the researcher, I am not permitted to request student contact information. I am requesting your assistance in distributing the attached documents to select identified students who attend your school.

1) Recruitment Letter
2) Letter of Information and Parental Consent, and Student Assent (for students under 18)
3) Letter of Information and Consent (for students 18 years and older)

These students are sought and invited to participate in a study based on their involvement as peer mentors at their elementary school [redacted] during the 2013-2014 school year. Information provided by program mentors will help us understand potential benefits and challenges for youth involved as mentors and will inform future peer mentoring program design and delivery. As outlined in the Recruitment Letter, students who wish to participate are asked to contact me to arrange an interview followed by participation in a sorting and rating activity. All meetings with students will take place outside of instructional time. Student participation is voluntary. Students under the age of 18 require parental consent and students 18 years and older may consent for themselves.

I appreciate your help in distributing the study documents to the students identified by the Research and Assessment department.

Please respond to the email address from which the email was sent to confirm the study recruitment letters were distributed.

The Thames Valley District School Board External Research Review Committee has reviewed and approved this study. Please feel free to contact me with any questions [redacted]

Thank you,

[redacted]

Students interested in participating are asked to contact me by:
[redacted]

Western University, Faculty of Education
[redacted]

Appendix G: Information Letter for Principals (2014-2016 Peer Mentoring Program Cohorts)

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Information Letter for Principals

Dear secondary school principal,

I have asked the TVDSB's Research and Assessment department to contact you. As the researcher, I am not permitted to request student contact information. I am requesting your assistance in distributing the attached documents to select identified students who attend your school.

1) Recruitment Letter
2) Letter of Information and Parental Consent, and Student Assent (for students under 18)
3) Letter of Information and Consent (for students 18 years and older)

These students are sought and invited to participate in a study based on their involvement as peer mentors at their elementary school during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. Information provided by program mentors will help us understand potential benefits and challenges for youth involved as mentors and will inform future peer mentoring program design and delivery. As outlined in the Recruitment Letter, students who wish to participate are asked to contact me to arrange an interview followed by participation in a sorting and rating activity. All meetings with students will take place outside of instructional time. Student participation is voluntary. Students under the age of 18 require parental consent and students 18 years and older may consent for themselves.

I appreciate your help in distributing the study documents to the students identified by the Research and Assessment department.

Please respond to the email address from which the email was sent to confirm the study recruitment letters were distributed.

The Thames Valley District School Board External Research Review Committee has reviewed and approved this study. Please feel free to contact me with any questions [redacted]

Thank you,

Melissa Coyne-Foresi, PhD student
[redacted]

Western University, Faculty of Education
[redacted]

Page 1 of 1 Version Date: 9/Mar/2018

Appendix H: Former Youth Mentor Recruitment Letter (2013-2014 Peer Mentoring Program Cohort)

Western Education

READ THIS PAGE FIRST

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Recruitment Letter

Hello former [redacted] Wiz Kid mentor,

I am Melissa Coyne-Foresi, however you may remember me as "Ms. C-F." I was the school support counsellor at [redacted] during your grade eight year and I ran the Wiz Kiz program you were involved in. I am a PhD student at Western now and would like to tell you about a study my supervisor and I are conducting. As a former youth mentor in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program, you are invited to participate in this study about your experiences mentoring younger children in the program. We are interested in your experiences and what you have taken with you into your future. Only students who were Wiz Kidz peer mentors during the 2013-2014 school year are able to participate in this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete two steps. First, you will be asked to participate in a 15- to 20-minute interview asking two open-ended questions about your experiences as a Wiz Kidz peer mentor. Second, I will return weeks later and ask you and the other interview participants to participate in a sorting and rating activity using the collective interview statements. The sorting and rating activity is expected to take 40-60 minutes. No preparation is needed to participate. You will be compensated with a $10 gift card for your participation in the interview, and a $10 gift card for your participation in the sorting activity.

Information provided by program mentors will help us understand potential benefits and challenges for youth involved as mentors. This study will inform the future Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program design and delivery. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, withdraw from the study, and/or withdraw your data from the study at any time. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used.

If you are interested in participating, please review the following forms:
If you are under 18 → 1) Letter of Information and Parent Consent form, and 2) Assent Letter
If you are 18 years and older → 1) Letter of Information and Consent form

If you are interested in participating, please contact [redacted] **or** [redacted]. Please contact me with any questions.

If you are interested in participating please contact me by: [redacted]

Thank you,

Melissa Coyne-Foresi (PhD student)
Western University, Faculty of Education
[redacted]

Page **1** of **1** Version Date: 29/Nov/2017

Appendix I: Former Youth Mentor Recruitment Letter (2014-2016 Peer Mentoring Program Cohorts)

Western Education

READ THIS PAGE FIRST

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Recruitment Letter

Hello former Wiz Kidz mentor,

I am Melissa Coyne-Foresi, however you may remember me as "Ms. C-F." I was the school support counsellor at [redacted] during your grade seven and eight years and I ran the Wiz Kidz program you were involved in. I am a PhD student at Western now and would like to tell you about a study my supervisor and I are conducting. As a former youth mentor in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program, you are invited to participate in this study about your experiences mentoring younger children in the program. We are interested in your experiences and what you have taken with you into your future. Only students who were Wiz Kidz peer mentors during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years are able to participate in this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete two steps. First, you will be asked to participate in a 15- to 20-minute interview asking two open-ended questions about your experiences as a Wiz Kidz peer mentor. Second, I will return weeks later and ask you and the other interview participants to participate in a sorting and rating activity using the collective interview statements. The sorting and rating activity is expected to take 40-60 minutes. No preparation is needed to participate. You will be compensated with a $10 gift card for your participation in the interview, and a $10 gift card for your participation in the sorting activity.

Information provided by program mentors will help us understand potential benefits and challenges for youth involved as mentors. This study will inform the future Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program design and delivery. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, withdraw from the study, and/or withdraw your data from the study at any time. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used.

If you are interested in participating, please review the following forms:
If you are under 18 → 1) Letter of Information and Parent Consent form, and 2) Assent Letter
If you are 18 years and older → 1) Letter of Information and Consent form

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at [redacted], or [redacted]. Please contact me with any questions.

If you are interested in participating please contact me by:

Thank you,

Melissa Coyne-Foresi (PhD student)
Western University, Faculty of Education
[redacted]

Appendix J: Letter of Information and Consent Form for Student Participants

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Letter of Information

Invitation to Participate
As a former youth mentor in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program, your child is invited to participate in this study about their experiences mentoring younger children in the program.

Purpose of Letter
The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding your child's participation in this research.

Purpose of Study
We are looking at the experiences of former Wiz Kidz youth mentors. We are interested in the mentor experience in the program and what they have taken with them into their futures.

Inclusion Criteria
Individuals who were Wiz Kidz peer mentors during the 2013-2014 school year are able to participate in this study.

Study Procedures
If you agree to your child's participation in this study, your child will be asked to complete two steps. First, your child will be asked to participate in a 15- to 20-minute interview asking two open-ended questions about his/her experiences as a Wiz Kidz peer mentor. The interviews will be audio-recorded and this will be mandatory. Second, the researcher will return weeks later and ask your child and the other interview participants to participate in a sorting and rating activity. The statements provided by your child's interview will be used collectively with the statements provided by the other participants in the sorting and rating activity. All identifying information will be removed from the statements. Your child will be asked to sort the unique interview statements in any way that makes sense to them. Then, your child will rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 5 based on their perceived order of importance. The sorting and rating activity may be completed with other participants from your child's school and although this will be done in a group setting, participants will work independently and be seated away from each other so they cannot see each other's work. The sorting and rating activity is expected to take 40-60 minutes. Both the interview and sorting and rating activity will be completed outside of instructional time, such as over the school lunch hour. No preparation is needed to participate. Melissa Coyne-Foresi, PhD student, and former school counsellor and facilitator of the Wiz Kidz program, will be conducting the interviews and sorting and rating activity.

Western Education

Possible Risks and Harms
There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

Possible Benefits
Data provided by program mentors will help us understand potential benefits and challenges for youth involved as mentors. This study will inform the future Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program design and delivery.

Compensation
Your child will be compensated with a $10 gift card for his or her participation in the interview, and a $10 gift card for his or her participation in the sorting activity. Compensation will be provided if your child decides to withdraw from the study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may communicate with the researcher verbally or through a written note if he/she refuses to participate, refuses to answer any questions, wishes to withdraw from the study, and/or wishes to withdraw his/her data from the study. If your child chooses to leave the study at any point, he/she can request his/her data to be withdrawn from the study at any time. Your child may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study with no effect on his/her future academic status. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.

Confidentiality
All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name and your child's name will not be used. All information collected for the study will be stored securely in my office for a period of no more than five years. All data collection from this study will be destroyed after five years. Representatives of the University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Contacts for Further Information
If you require any further information regarding this research project or your child's participation in the study you may contact Elizabeth Nowicki, Principal Investigator at [redacted] If you have any questions about your and your child's rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [redacted]

Publication
If the results of the study are published, your name and your child's name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please provide your name and contact number on a piece of paper separate from the Consent Form.

Western Education

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Nowicki

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Consent to Participate Form

I have read the Letter of Information, the nature of the study has been explained to me and I agree for my child to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree for my child to participate in an interview about their experience as a mentor and to participate in a sorting activity a few weeks later.

* Please return this consent form to Melissa Coyne-Foresi, PhD student, at your child's interview.

Student Name (Printed): _____

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed): _____

Parent Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix K: Former Youth Mentors Assent Form

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Letter of Information

Invitation to Participate
As a former youth mentor in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program, you are invited to participate in this study about your experiences mentoring younger children in the program.

Purpose of Letter
The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding your participation in this research.

Purpose of Study
We are looking at the experiences of former Wiz Kidz youth mentors. We are interested in your experience in the program and what you have taken with you into your future.

Inclusion Criteria
Individuals who were Wiz Kidz peer mentors during the 2013-2014 school year are able to participate in this study.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete two steps. First, you will be asked to participate in a 15- to 20-minute interview asking two open-ended questions about your experiences as a Wiz Kidz peer mentor. The interviews will be audio-recorded and this will be mandatory. Second, the researcher will return weeks later and ask you and the other interview participants to participate in a sorting and rating activity. The statements you provide through the interview will be used collectively with the statements provided by the other participants in the sorting and rating activity. All identifying information will be removed from the statements. You will be asked to sort the unique interview statements in any way that makes sense to you. Then, you will rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 5 based on your perceived order of importance. The sorting and rating activity may be completed with other participants from your school; although this will be done in a group setting, participants will work independently and be seated away from each other so they cannot see each other's work. The sorting and rating activity is expected to take 40-60 minutes. Both the interview and sorting and rating activity will be completed outside of instructional time, such as over the school lunch hour. No preparation is needed to participate. Melissa Coyne-Foresi, PhD student, and former school counsellor and facilitator of the Wiz Kidz program, will be conducting the interviews and sorting and rating activity.

Possible Risks and Harms
There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

Possible Benefits
Data provided by program mentors will help us understand potential benefits and challenges for youth involved as mentors. This study will inform the future Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program design and delivery.

Compensation
You will be compensated with a $10 gift card for your participation in the interview, and a $10 gift card for your participation in the sorting activity. Compensation will be provided if you decide to withdraw from the study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may communicate with the researcher verbally or through a written note if you refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, wish to withdraw from the study, and/or wish to withdraw your data from the study. If you choose to leave the study at any point, you can request your data to be withdrawn from the study at any time. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study with no effect on your future academic status. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.

Confidentiality
All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. All information collected for the study will be stored securely in my office for a period of no more than five years. All data collection from this study will be destroyed after five years. Representatives of the University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Contacts for Further Information
If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Elizabeth Nowicki, Principal Investigator at [redacted]. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [redacted]

Publication
If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please provide your name and contact number on a piece of paper separate from the Consent Form.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
Sincerely,

Elizabeth Nowicki

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Assent to Participate Form

I have read the Assent Letter, the nature of the study has been explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in an interview about my experience as a mentor and to participate in a sorting activity a few weeks later.

I want to participate in this study.

Your Name_____ Date_____

Your Signature _____ Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Age _____ _____

Appendix L: Former Youth Mentor Interview Guide

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Interview Guide

When you think about what happened for you in the Wiz Kidz program, how would you describe the relationships and connections you made at school, at home, or in the community, or elsewhere?

Prompts: "can you tell me more about that?" "with who?" "what strategies did you use?" and "did you encounter difficulties?"

When you think about what happened for you in the Wiz Kidz program, how has being a mentor helped you in your own life?

Prompts: "at work/school/home?" "what specific skills" and "what specific lessons were learned?"

Appendix M: Educator Recruitment Letter

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Recruitment Letter

Dear teachers and educators,

My name is Melissa Coyne-Foresi and I am PhD candidate in the School and Applied Child Psychology program at Western. I have a special interest in in-school peer mentoring programs. As part of my PhD dissertation, I have investigated the reflections of former youth mentors who participated in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program I facilitated at two of my assigned schools between 2013-2017. Recently, I interviewed former youth mentors regarding their relational connections and lessons learned through the program, then invited them to sort comments taken from the interviews into thematic categories and rate them on importance. I would like to invite you to participate in my study by sorting and rating the same set of statements that were used with the former youth mentors.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the sorting and rating activity using the former youth mentors' interview statements. The sorting and rating activity is expected to take 20-60 minutes and will take place at a location of your convenience. You will be compensated with a $10 gift card for your participation.

Research has shown that while school staff may believe they accurately understand the student experience, students may not conceptualize a given construct as adults think they do. This study will inform future Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program design and delivery. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, withdraw from the study, and/or withdraw your data from the study at any time. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used.

If you are interested in participating, please review the attached Letter of Information and Consent. If you know of any grades 6-8 teachers, rotary teachers or support staff of grades 6-8 students, or elementary administrators who may be interested in participating, please give them a copy of this Recruitment Letter, and Letter of Information and Consent Form, and ask them to contact me by email. Please contact me with any questions.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at [redacted]

Thank you,

Melissa Coyne-Foresi (PhD student)

Western University, Faculty of Education
[redacted]

Appendix N: Letter of Information and Consent Form for Educator Participants

Western Education

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Letter of Information

Invitation to Participate
As teachers and educators in the elementary school system, you are invited to participate in this study about stakeholder perspectives of student social and leadership programming within schools.

Purpose of Letter
The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding your participation in this research.

Purpose of Study
We are looking at teacher and educator interpretations of the data provided by former youth mentors to identify any discrepancies in the staff and student conceptual understanding of the peer mentoring program experience.

Inclusion Criteria
Only grades 6-8 teachers, including rotary teachers and support staff of grades 6-8 students, and elementary administrators can participate.

Study Procedures
Earlier in this study, we investigated the reflections of former youth mentors who participated in the Wiz Kidz peer mentoring between 2013-2017. The former youth mentors were interviewed regarding their relational connections and lessons learned through the program, then invited to sort comments taken from the interviews into thematic categories and rate them on importance. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sort the unique interview statements in any way that makes sense to you and rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 5 based on your perceived order of importance. You will sort and rate the same set of statements that were used with the former youth mentors. All identifying information has been removed from the statements. The sorting and rating activity is expected to take 20-60 minutes and will take place at a location of your convenience outside of the workplace and outside of work hours. Melissa Coyne-Foresi, PhD student and former facilitator of the Wiz Kidz program, will be conducting the sorting and rating activity.

Possible Risks and Harms
There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

Possible Benefits
In efforts to capture a broader program stakeholder perspective, teacher and educator interpretation of the youth data will identify any discrepancies in the staff and student conceptual understanding of the peer mentoring program experience. This study will inform the future Wiz Kidz peer mentoring program design and delivery.

Compensation
You will be compensated with a $10 gift card for your participation in the sorting and rating activity. Compensation will be provided if you decide to withdraw from the study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may communicate with the researcher verbally or through a written note if you refuse to participate, wish to withdraw from the study, and/or wish to withdraw your data from the study. If you choose to leave the study at any point, you can request your data to be withdrawn from the study at any time. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.

Confidentiality
All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. All information collected for the study will be stored securely in my office for a period of no more than five years. All data collection from this study will be destroyed after five years. Representatives of the University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Contacts for Further Information
If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Elizabeth Nowicki, Principal Investigator at [redacted] If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [redacted]

Publication
If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please provide your name and contact number on a piece of paper separate from the Consent Form.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Nowicki

Project Title: Former Youth Mentors: A Reflection of Skills and Lessons Learned from Mentoring their Younger Peers

Principal Investigator:
Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Consent to Participate Form

I have read the Letter of Information, the nature of the study has been explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the sorting and rating activity using the collective youth interview statements.

* Please return this consent form to Melissa Coyne-Foresi, PhD student.

Name (Printed): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix O: Western University Ethics Study Closure Acknowledgement

Date: 11 November 2019

To: Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

Project ID: 110053

Study Title: Former Youth Mentors

Application Type: Study Closure Form

Review Type: Delegated

Date Acknowledgement Issued: 11/Nov/2019

Dear Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

The Western University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the application, and the closure of this study is acknowledged. The REB file on this study is now officially closed.

Thank you for using the Western Research Ethics Manager System (WREM).

Sincerely,

The Office of Human Research Ethics

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

PhD (Field of School and Applied Child Psychology), Western University, London, ON (September 2017-current)

- Practicum I: Mary J. Wright Research and Education Centre at Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Centre, London, ON
- Practicum II: Thames Valley District School Board Psychological Services, London, ON
- Practicum III: Child and Youth Development Clinic, London, ON
- Internship: Thames Valley District School Board Psychological Services, London, ON

MA (Field of Applied Psychology in Schools), Western University, London, ON (2016-2017)

M.Ed (Educational Counselling), University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON (2005-2007)

- Internship: Youth Services Bureau, Mobile Crisis/Intake Unit, Ottawa, ON

BA (Specialization in Psychology), King's University College, London, ON (2001-2005)

EXPERIENCE

Psychometrist, Thames Valley District School Board, London, ON (2019- current)
Graduate Student Assistant, Canadian Centre for Inclusive Education, Faculty of Education Western University, London, ON (2017- current)
School Support Counsellor, Thames Valley District School Board, London, ON (2007-2019)
Graduate Research Assistant, Centre for School Mental Health, Faculty of Education, Western University, London, ON (2016-2017)
Family Consultant, Family Consultant and Victim Services Unit, London Police Service, London, ON (2011)

VOLUNTEER WORK

Elementary School Council, London, ON (2015-current)
London and District Distress Centre, London, ON (2005-2007)
London Coalition Against Pesticides, London, ON (2003-2005)
Canadian Red Cross, London, ON (2003-2004)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Student Affiliate, Ontario Psychological Association (2018-current)
Student Affiliate, Canadian Society for the Study of Education (2018-current)
Registered Social Worker, Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (2014-current)

SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

Walter M. Lobb Ontario Graduate Award, February 2018
Ontario Graduate Scholarship, April 2017, $15,000.00
W.A. Townshend Gold Medal in Education Award (highest academic standing), 2017
Inclusive Education Award, March 2017, $750.00
Western Continuing Admissions Scholarship, September 2016, $3700.00

GRANTS

Nowicki, E., & **Coyne-Foresi, M.** "Former youth mentors: A reflection of skills and lessons learned from mentoring their younger peers." Faculty of Education, Western University. Faculty Research Development Fund, January 1, 2018-June 30, 2018. Funded for $4088.

Coyne-Foresi, M. "An exploration of benefits for youth mentors in an Indigenous high school peer mentoring program." Faculty of Education, Western University. Graduate Student Internal Conference Grant, November 2017. Funded for $650.

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed contributions

Coyne-Foresi, M., & Nowicki, E. (2020). Building connections and relationships at school: Youth reflect on mentoring their younger peers. *Journal of Early Adolescence*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/0272431620912472

Coyne-Foresi, M., Crooks, C., Chiodo, D., Nowicki, E., & Dare, L. (2019). Teaching them, teaching me: Youth conceptualize benefits of being a mentor in an Indigenous high school peer mentoring program. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 27*(5), 531-528. doi: 10.1080/13611267.2019.1675851

Coyne-Foresi, M. (2015). Wiz Kidz: Fostering school connectedness through an in-school student mentoring program, *Professional School Counseling Journal, 19*(1), 68-79. doi: 10.5330/1096-2409-19.1.68

Non-refereed contributions

Coyne-Foresi, M. (2018). A mixed methods exploration of benefits for youth mentors in an Indigenous high school peer mentoring program [Abstract]. *Canadian Psychological Association Educational and School Psychology Newsletter*, Fall/Winter 2017.

Coyne-Foresi, M. & McKane, S. (2018). *Parenting your school-age child: Parent manual*. London, ON: Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Centre.

Coyne-Foresi, M. (2016). *Research snapshot: Challenges in evaluating culturally-relevant programs for Indigenous youth*. [Summary of the article Navigating between rigour and community-based research partnerships: Building the evaluation of the Uniting Our Nations health promotion program for FNMI youth, by Claire V. Crooks, Angela Snowshoe, Debbie Chiodo and Candace Brunette-Debassige.] Centre for School Mental Health, Western University. London, Ontario.

Lapp, A., Cywink, M., Crooks, C., **Coyne-Foresi, M.**, Kirkham, A., & Hughes, R. (2016). *Uniting Our Nations: A peer mentoring program for Aboriginal youth: Mentor's manual* (2nd ed.). London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health, Western University.

Lapp, A., Cywink, M., Crooks, C., **Coyne-Foresi, M.**, Kirkham, A., & Hughes, R. (2016). *Uniting Our Nations: A peer mentoring program for Aboriginal youth: Mentor's workbook* (2nd ed.). London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health, Western University.

Ad Hoc Reviewer

Journal of Adolescent Research
Journal of Interpersonal Violence

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Coyne-Foresi, M., Nowicki, E., & Dare, L. (accepted). Understanding youth mentors' experience mentoring their younger peers. Paper to be presented at Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Annual Conference, Western University, May 30-June 3. 2020 (conference cancelled due to COVID-19).

Coyne-Foresi, M., Nowicki, E., & Dare, L. (2019). Learning from youth mentors: A future-oriented perspective. Roundtable presentation, 2019 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting, Toronto, Ontario, April 5-9, 2019.

Coyne-Foresi, M. (2018). *An exploration of benefits for youth mentors in an Indigenous high school peer mentoring program*. Paper presented at the 2018 Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition Conference, Hamilton, ON, March 26-27, 2018.

WORKSHOPS, TRAINING AND SEMINARS

Clinical Training

2019 - Violence Treat Risk Assessment (VTRA), Levels 1 and 2, London, ON
- Barbara Wand Seminar in Professional Ethics, Standards, and Conduct, Toronto, ON

2016 - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Living Works Education, London, ON

2013 - Friends for Life Prevention of Anxiety and Depression (Grades 2-12), London, ON

2008 - Behaviour Modification Systems (BMS), London, ON

2006 - Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), Basic and Advanced Levels, Trauma Management Group, Ottawa, ON

Assessment

2018 - Practical Strategies for Psychological Assessment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children and Adolescents (Drs. Geva, Wiener, Cunningham), London, ON

2011 - Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment, London Police Service, London, ON

Intervention

2020 - Telepsychology With Children and Teens in the Age of COVID-19, National Register of Health Service Psychologists, Webinar
- The "A" Word: Exploring Anxiety and Autism from a Behavioral Perspective Webinar

2018 - Fourth R: Healthy Relationships Plus, London, ON

2017 - Canadian Conference on Promoting Healthy Relationships for Youth, London, ON

2016 - Relationship Matters: Harnessing the Power of Attachment, Neufeld Institute at Waldorf School, London, ON
- 100 Years of Loss: The Residential School System in Canada, London, ON
- Mind Over Mood: CBT Boot Camp 2.0, London, ON
- FNMI Wampum Belt Teaching, TVDSB, London, ON

2015 - Roots of Empathy Certified Instructor, Cambridge, ON
- Cultural Awareness of Arab and Somali Communities, John Howard Society, London, ON
- It Matters to Us: FNMI Residential School Inquiry, Western University, London, ON
- Innovation Forum, TVDSB, London, ON

2014 - Making Sense of Counterwill, Neufeld Institute, Vancouver, BC, Online Course
- Working with Stuck Kids, Neufeld Institute at CRPI, London, ON
- Working with Trauma Survivors, London, ON
- Mindfulness in a Clinical Setting, London, ON

2011 - Canadian Crisis Intervention Team Conference, Hamilton, ON

2009 - Child Abuse Investigations: Partnering with Parents and Professionals, Children's Aid Society of London/Middlesex and London Police Service, London, ON
- Internet Exploitation, The Regional Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centre, London, ON

2007 - Citizen Academy, London Police Service, London, ON

2005 - Crisis Intervention Certificate Program, Fanshawe College, London, ON